

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

TEACHER ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS:
THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS
WITHIN THE QUEBEC EDUCATIONAL REFORM

THESIS PRESENTED
AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DOCTORAL DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

ÉVALUATION DES PRATIQUES D'ÉVALUATION
ET DES PERCEPTION DES ENSEIGNANTS:
L'UTILISATION D'ÉVALUATIONS ALTERNATIVES DANS LE
CADRE DE LA RÉFORME D'ÉDUCATION AU QUÉBEC

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SUMMARY

With the Quebec curriculum reform as a backdrop, this study investigated teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment and their current classroom assessments practices. Specifically, the study sought to gain an understanding of the extent to which teachers use different classroom assessment methods and tools to understand and to support both the learning and teaching processes. Particular emphasis in the study was placed on exploring teacher knowledge, perceptions, and use of classroom alternative assessment methods. The following three objective guided the study: 1) To document the student assessment practices most commonly used during the year by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in two subjects: Language Arts (French or English), and Math. 2) To explore the student assessment perceptions held by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers. 3) To assess the knowledge, perceptions, and willingness of Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in the use of various forms of alternative assessments in different learning situations.

A sample of 65 elementary Cycle 1 and 2, English, French and Math teachers affiliated with the Lester B Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and the Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal participated in the study. The study developed a questionnaire to establish the teachers' perceptions and student evaluative practices, as well as to gauge their knowledge, perceptions, and use of alternative assessment methods. The questionnaire required that participants complete several Likert Scales, transcribe responses to questions, as well as respond verbally to several questions posed by the researcher.

The analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire is of both a qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative (percentage; chi-square) nature. Teachers generally perceived that the assessment practices that they are using in their classrooms with their students, be it either traditional testing techniques or more alternative type assessment, hold both advantages and drawbacks to their use. Numerous participants in the study reported that with the advent of the education reforms in Quebec, the way they perceived student learning and as an extension student assessment had somewhat changed over the past several years. The data obtained also revealed that there are certain factors that are likely to influence teachers' classroom assessment practice. For example, the actual evaluation practices of teachers varied depending on the subject matter taught. Results also revealed that teachers' readiness to try out new ideas and different forms of assessment seem to depend on academic qualification. The teachers who had higher academic qualifications are more willing to try out new ideas than those who have lower

academic qualifications. The data also reveals that the respondents possessing a greater understanding of the differences between traditional and alternative assessments are more likely to use alternative assessments within their student assessment repertoire. In addition, teachers from the public school board were more inclined to use alternative assessment methods as compared to the those teachers from the Jewish day schools. It also appears to be a division between the assessment methods used in Cycle 1 and those used in Cycle 2, the use of alternative assessments being more prevalent in the second case. Lastly, those teachers with more formal education (i.e. at the university level) seemed to be more open to the possibilities of newer methods of assessment, whereas those teachers with less education seemed more inclined toward the more traditional techniques.

The results obtained are discussed with respects to the literature on student evaluation either by authors reporting on recent developments in cognitive psychology and in alternative assessments, or those discussing recent realized educational reforms –specifically that which is currently being implemented here in Quebec.

RÉSUMÉ

Avec la réforme québécoise de l'éducation en toile de fond, cette recherche étudie les perceptions des enseignants des évaluations en classe et de leurs pratiques actuelles d'évaluation en classe. Plus particulièrement, ce projet de thèse a cherché à avoir une meilleure compréhension de l'étendue avec laquelle les enseignants utilisent différents outils et méthodes d'évaluation pour comprendre et soutenir à la fois les processus d'apprentissage et d'enseignement. Les trois objectifs suivants ont guidé la recherche : 1) Documenter les pratiques d'évaluation les plus souvent utilisées pendant l'année par des enseignants des Cycles Un et Deux dans deux matières : Langage (français ou anglais) et Mathématiques. 2) Explorer les perceptions des élèves concernant les évaluations tenues par les enseignants des Cycles Un et Deux. 3) Évaluer les connaissances, perception et l'enthousiasme des enseignants des Cycles Un et Deux à utiliser des formes variées d'Évaluations alternatives dans différentes situations d'apprentissage.

Un échantillon de 65 enseignants en français, anglais et mathématiques des Cycles Un et Deux du primaire, affiliés à la commission scolaire Lester B. Pearson et les Écoles Indépendantes Juives de Montréal, ont participé à la recherche. Un questionnaire a été développé pour établir les perceptions des enseignants et des élèves concernant les pratiques évaluatives, de même que pour mesurer leurs connaissances, perceptions et utilisation de méthodes alternatives d'évaluation. Le questionnaire requiert que les participants complètent plusieurs échelles de Likert, transcrivent des réponses à des questions et répondent verbalement à plusieurs questions posées par le chercheur.

L'analyse des données obtenues à partir des questionnaires est de nature qualitative (analyse de contenu) et quantitative (pourcentage, chi-carré). Les enseignants perçoivent généralement que les pratiques d'évaluation qu'ils utilisent en classe avec leurs élèves, qu'elles soit des techniques traditionnelles ou des types d'évaluation plus alternatives, retiennent à la fois des avantages et des inconvénients à leur utilisation. Plusieurs participants à l'étude ont rapporté qu'avec l'avènement de la réforme d'éducation au Québec, la façon qu'ils perçoivent les apprentissages des élèves et, par extension, l'évaluation des élèves, a quelque peu changé au cours des dernières années. Les données obtenues ont également révélé que certains facteurs ont plus de chance d'influencer les pratiques d'évaluation des enseignants. Par exemple, les pratiques d'évaluation actuelles des enseignants varient selon la matière enseignée. Les résultats démontrent aussi que le fait, pour les enseignants, d'être prêts à essayer de nouvelles idées et différentes formes d'évaluation semble dépendre de la qualification académique. Les enseignants qui avaient des qualifications

académiques plus élevées étaient plus enclins à essayer de nouvelles idées que ceux qui avaient des qualifications académiques plus faibles. Les données recueillies font également ressortir que les intervenants possédant une meilleure compréhension des différences entre les évaluations traditionnelles et alternatives sont plus enclins à utiliser des évaluations alternatives dans leur répertoire d'outils d'évaluation. De plus, les enseignants de la commission scolaire publique étaient plus portés à utiliser des méthodes d'évaluation alternatives en comparaison aux enseignants des écoles juives. Il semble également y avoir une division entre les méthodes d'évaluation utilisées au Cycle Un et au Cycle Deux, l'utilisation de méthodes alternatives étant plus prévalent dans le second cas. Finalement, les enseignants avec une éducation plus formelle (c.à.d. niveau universitaire) semblaient être plus ouverts aux possibilités de nouvelles méthodes d'évaluation, alors que ceux avec moins d'éducation semblaient plus portés vers les méthodes plus traditionnelles.

Les résultats obtenus sont essentiellement discutés à la lumière des écrits recensés en matière d'évaluation, soit chez les auteurs faisant le point sur les travaux récents en psychologie cognitive et en évaluation alternative, soit chez ceux associés aux récentes réformes éducatives mises en place et plus particulièrement celle présentement en voie d'implantation ici au Québec.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of attention given to assessments in the classroom. Assessment of student learning has become a topic of great emphasis in the educational literature. Many previously unfamiliar terms, such as authentic assessment, alternative assessment and portfolios, have become a part of the established vocabulary in educational publications. Assessment has moved to the front of educational reform efforts (Thurlow, 2000). Reform efforts have explored various assessment methods that can be used to best understand individual students, support the attainment of high standards, and support student teaching (Herman, 1997). Now a day, student assessment is clearly a central component of any curriculum. If schools are to focus on the basics while still aspiring to promote the full development of intellectual and methodological skills (among many others skills and learning strategies), student evaluation practices must than allow for an evaluation of static knowledge as well as an evaluation of the dynamic process put into place by each student during the completion of tasks or when solving pertinent, real-life, and varied problems.

The main goals of the classroom assessment process appear to be changing. A stronger interest now lies in gathering data on students that focus on growth over time, rather than comparing students to each other. An increasing amount of emphasis is also being placed on assessing the process by which student's problem solve, as opposed to evaluating only the final outcome. Today's focus seems to be on what students know and master, rather than on what they don't. Greater sensitivity and awareness appears to be placed on the diverse learning styles and proficiency levels of the student population. With the advent of educational reforms in various

countries, the assessment process appears to have become more individualized and student centred.

The educational reform movements have been directly influenced and to some degree byproducts of the new tenets and assumptions in learning that have recently gained prominence. As a result, student assessment practices have also been directly influenced by the changing penchants in the way we view learning. Various novel assessment approaches have been proposed and are currently being utilized in the classroom. Case in point is the use of alternative assessment techniques. Alternative assessments can be regarded as testing methods that require students to create an answer or product that demonstrates their knowledge and skills (OTA, 1992). These forms of assessment are in stark contrast to more traditional types of student assessment that focus mainly on the correct response (such as multiple-choice and short-answer type tests). Alternative assessment use has been shown in the literature to hold numerous advantages over the more traditional assessment methods, including being able to assess student skills in all its diversity and complexity (Gardner, 1992a Wiggins, 1997).

Alternative assessment methods have come to the forefront of evaluative student practices. Their use has gained tremendous momentum in the United States in the past ten years. Yet, their implementation into the Quebec educational system has been slow. However, as a result of the current curriculum reform and the proposed evaluation policies, teachers are being encouraged to increase the frequency in which they use alternative assessments in their individual classrooms.

When one considers the growing interest by researchers in the development and the establishment of new types of student evaluation, as well as the policy changes recommended to both the teaching and evaluation of students as outlined in various recent educational reforms in various countries and more particularly here in Quebec, the moment seemed opportune for us to provide a type of “progress report” on teacher perceptions towards student assessment and their evaluative practices - specifically those teachers that have already been immersed in the educational reform efforts in Quebec. Such a study makes it possible, according to us, to capture the pulse of a cohort of Quebec elementary school teachers relative to their perceptions and practices regarding the evaluation of students. The study could also serve to assist experts and specialists in the field of evaluation in identifying routes to explore to better inform and equip Quebec teachers in regards to alternative methods of alternative evaluation that they may use with their students. Indeed, it is no longer enough to ensure the acquisition of subject-based knowledge, it is also necessary to promote and evaluate a rich and varied series of general and transversal competencies. Considering all the changes in the world of student evaluation, we have attempted to capture a portrait of where Quebec elementary teachers find themselves. Admittedly, only a small sample of teachers have participated in this study. However, we hope that our study sets the tone for further research and that many others follow and further explore the various questions related to this subject matter.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

1.1 General considerations regarding the nature of student assessment in education

A growing body of research suggests that assessment greatly influences classroom instruction and that it is closely linked to teaching and learning. Numerous authors have remarked that assessment is an integral part of good instruction and is an essential component of effective teaching (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Perrenoud, 1998; Villeneuve & Laliberté, 2002; Tardif, 2005). Assessment methods are viewed by some as instruments for educational improvement. It has been suggested that teachers model their classroom practices in line with the methods and the results of the various assessments that they employ and that assessment influences classroom teaching and student activities (Herman, 1997).

Generally speaking, assessment is the practice of collecting data for the purpose of generating «a portrait» of the student knowledge and progress; of which the data from the assessment is often used for the purpose of making decisions about students. More and more authors view assessment as the process of measuring / evaluating a product, a performance, or a learning skill and giving feedback to students that documents their growth and provides directives to improve their future performance. Assessment can obviously take many forms, can be either one-dimensional, time-specific, or extend over time and aims to capture the quality of a student's work. By in large, assessment represents the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn or mastered and as well the standards or goals that are

held for student accomplishment. According some specialists in the field, another purpose of assessment is to find out what each student is able to do with the information and knowledge that is presented to them.

There are many different types of methods teachers could use to assess their students. To date, one of the greatest and often used distinctions in the field of assessment types is the one that differentiate *summative* and *formative* assessment (Lusignan & Goupil, 1997).

Summative assessment is generally defined as a “product-oriented,” designed to certify a student’s mastery of objectives and to gauge the level of acquisition of a specific learning objective or curriculum goal. Summative assessment is generally used to make a determination at one point in time, or after a set number of performances, about how much a student knows and can do. It is intended to measure what students know and understand and is usually used to assign grades. The composition of this assessment, often referred to as “*traditional testing techniques*”, usually consists of paper-and-pencil assessment techniques in which student information is gathered through seatwork assignments, homework, quizzes, or tests (Scallon, 1996; Gattullo, 2000; Legendre, 2001).

Formative assessment is utilized, for the most part, to monitor learning progress during instruction, provide continuous feedback to students, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce learning (Linn and Gronlund, 1995). Formative assessment is “process-oriented” and designed to inform teachers of student change. This type of assessment is generally performed on a continuous basis with the aim of determining what should be done to improve future student achievement (Gattullo, 2000). For many users’ formative assessments is a good means of improving students’ achievement of learning objectives and a good way of finding out and directing

student attention to what they don't understand or have not yet mastered. Formative assessment is recognized as a reliable format in which to provide students feedback in a form that will help them improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Choi et al, 2001). Formative assessments offer educators information that they can use to improve educational programs and overall teaching (Lee, 2001; Tardif, 2005). For those many reasons the use of formative assessment, particularly at the elementary level, has gained great prominence in North American schools in the past decade (McIntosh, 1997; Lee, 2001) including here in Quebec (Conrod, 1999; Sparkes, Sturge, Dupuis, Fyfe, Taylor, Sullivan; 1999; Villeneuve & Laliberté, 2002; Tardif, 2005).

There are, of course, several types of formative assessments and specialists in the field have used different categories or labels to qualify them. One important and frequently used category or label is the one referred to as "*alternative assessment techniques*". Some of the evaluation techniques most recognized in the field of alternative assessment include the following: information gathered through an examination of learning-progress (e.g. portfolios), of realised projects (e.g. expressed in writings, drawings or oral presentations), or of collaborative group performances. Likewise, tools that allow students to self-assess their current level of knowledge and/or competence, during an ongoing educational experience, are also kinds of alternative assessment techniques.

After having provided some background information with respects to our global subject matter, the ensuing sections of this chapter will explore four themes related to the topic of student evaluation. The themes chosen and elaborated upon are directly or indirectly associated with our research questions and objectives. The first section is devoted to examining traditional testing techniques and reviewing contemporary critique of this form of student evaluation. The next section explores

how contemporary means of conceptualization teaching and learning have brought about a change in the focus and objectives of evaluating students in the classroom. Specifically, the section will review the principles of cognitive psychology as they relate to learning and explore how the tenets of cognitive psychology have been instrumental in bringing about a shift in the way student evaluation is perceived, developed, and administered. The subsequent section explores in detail different alternative assessment techniques. Definitions of the term are provided, as well as a summary of the general features of this type of evaluations, including an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of its use. The current Quebec educational reform is then presented by addressing both the issue of the curriculum and the evaluation policies being proposed by the Quebec Ministry of Education. The chapter ends with the research objectives being stated, along with the presentation of the study's research questions.

1.2 Traditional testing techniques and contemporary critique

Historically, the North American educational system was intended to teach routine skills: simple computation, reading predictable texts, reciting civic or religious codes, etc. Learning the "old" basics was the rule of thumb (Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Consequently, student progress and achievement in the classroom has, for the most part, been assessed using standardized or norm referenced tests (Wiggins, 1993). These types of assessment, usually in the form of multiple choice (where respondents must select an answer from among a set of options) or short answer (which requires correct responses only), focus mainly on fact retrieval where information must be known in advance of writing the test (Messick, 1994).

The principle characteristics of this form of evaluation, as reported in the literature are the following. First, the traditional testing design is globally based on a

stimulus / response view of learning (Gardner, 1992a; Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Wiggins, 1993). The use of this formal testing model aligns well with a “uniform view of schooling”, advocating a homogenized education (Gardner, 1992a). Finally, results obtained by traditional testing have had a major influence on student promotion and placement decisions, on the professional advancement of teachers, and indirectly even on school funding (Ascher, 1990).

The most frequently cited advantages of traditional testing are the following. Generally, techniques associated with traditional testing are not time consuming (they are quick to apply and to correct), even when they include higher level thinking items. Traditional tests are easy to administer and grade, and can be simplified so that they are easy to score reliably. It is also relatively simple to validate and determine internal consistency for traditional tests (Johnson, 1989). Traditional tests are especially valid for testing students' factual knowledge (Brown and Shavelson, 1994). Moreover, this form of assessment offers the advantage of being easily adaptable, they allow for extensive sampling of material, they can be widely implemented, they can be used to measure many levels of learning, and they offer assurances that similar results will be obtained if a student was re-tested shortly thereafter (Johnson, 1989).

For the past fifteen years this form of evaluation has however been subjected to critical review. According to numerous authors (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Gardner, 1992a; Wiggins, 1993; Messick, 1994) traditional testing practices are fraught with varied drawbacks. Included in the criticism of traditional tests is that this form of assessment offers limited feedback as to the students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress (Wiggins, 1993). The information obtained by these assessments provides limited insight regarding the range of student competency in a specific subject area (Asher, 1990; Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Since student results are mainly appraised for correctness or goodness with respect to a single criterion.

Usually there is no record of an extended process or product that can be scored for multiple aspects of quality (Messick, 1994). Moreover, because traditional assessment relies on indirect or “proxy items” as simplistic substitutes for what students think, valid inferences about student performances cannot be made (Wiggins, 1990). According to Resnick and Resnick, (1992), for example, this method of assessment reinforces the idea that student interpretation of subject matter is not expected (it is viewed as if the task of conventional assessment is to quickly find or guess the “right” answer rather than to engage in interpretative, reflective, activity).

Traditional tests tend to reveal primarily whether the student can recognize, recall, or “plug in” what was learned out of context. Because conventional tests typically only ask the student to select or write correct responses, irrespective of reasons, there is rarely an adequate opportunity to plan, revise and substantiate responses. Assessment of the process of thinking and higher-order cognitive interpretation appear to be constrained with traditional testing (Messick, 1994). Merely marking a correct or preferred option on an answer sheet as in a multiple-choice test does not reflect the amount or kind of thinking or effort involved. Counteractive to problem solving and critical thinking skills, traditional test problems often leave little room for hypothesis and questioning (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998).

According to some authors, traditional testing has led to an unfortunate side effect. Under pressure to help students do well on tests, teachers have tended to focus their efforts on test content, (ex. mimic multiple choice or short-answer formats of the tests) and devoted a great amount of time to preparing students to do well on these tests (Herman, 1997). The net effect has been a narrowing of the curriculum to the basic skills assessed and a neglect of complex thinking skills and other subject areas that are not assessed. Teachers also appear to use the test format as a model for curriculum and instruction. Test preparation often means practice with test-like

items, with more and more of the curriculum given over to such preparation (Wiggins, 1990).

Additional criticism includes the fact that traditional testing techniques tend to ignore individual student differences, developmental levels, and forms of expertise (Wiggins, 1993). In addition, critics suggest that these forms of assessment are generally disconnected from realistic contexts and constraints. Students experience questions and tasks under constraints that are often highly decontextualized and not typical of “real-life” situations (Gardner, 1992a; Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Wiggins, 1993). Lastly, criticism also surrounds the fact that traditional testing methods have been insensitive to developmental considerations as identified by Piaget in that most traditional tests presuppose that students will be literate in the second level symbol-systems of the culture (e.g., writing and numbers).

As a result of the criticism leveled against traditional testing techniques, in addition to new assumptions about knowledge, understanding, and instruction, has led educators and researchers to explore various other forms of student assessment methods. This, in turn, has led to an increased use and study of various forms of formative assessments. In the past twenty years, the evolving works in theories in cognition have greatly influenced student assessment. Specifically, the principles of cognitive psychology and its relationship to learning have been influential in shaping educational theory and student assessment practice. The following section will explore how cognitive psychology, and more precisely some principles related to learning, has been influential in driving a paradigm shift in how teaching, learning, and assessment are conceptualized.

1.3 Cognitive psychology and its influence on student assessment

Following on the so-called "cognitive revolution" in psychology that began in the 1960s, education has been acquiring new insights concerning the learning process. These new insights (i.e. this novel comprehension of the learning process) have suggested new approaches and contexts for learning as well as new ways of assessing learning. Several cognitive psychologists have been paying increasing attention to education as an area of application of psychological knowledge and as a source of important research questions worth investigating. As research in cognitive psychology has progressed and has increasingly addressed itself to educational issues, newer links have been formed between psychology and education.

A review of the literature permits us to select three main principles, among many others, that are according to us and many authors, at the heart of the credo of the cognitive psychology interest in educational issues. The three principles retained are the following ones: the importance of "high-order abilities" and their links to thinking processes (reasoning, problem solving, etc.), the principle according to which learning is an active and constructive process, and the inevitable and abounding ideas of collaborative learning.

The high-order abilities in the thinking processes

Recent research findings in cognitive psychology suggest that education and assessment must focus on "high-order abilities" mostly found in the problem solving and thinking processes (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Herman, 1997). Students need to be able to use reason and exercise personal judgment, not just to perform routine operations but in order to engage in thorough and sustained cognitive activities.

“Real” learning involves thinking. Thinking and reasoning are intimately involved in successfully learning even in respects to elementary levels of reading, mathematics, and other school subjects. Herman (1997) contends that schools should emphasize complex thinking and problem solving if students are to be well prepared for future success and lifelong learning. Assessments that are properly developed and implemented should allow for reliable measurement of thinking and reasoning as applied in varied school subject matters (Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Pandey (1990) suggests that schools should diminish the role of routine computation and focus instead on the conceptual insights and analytical skills.

The “thinking-oriented” approach to learning and assessment constitutes a shift in traditional education policy. Pandey (1990) maintains that instruction and assessment efforts should attempt to include additional thinking and reasoning dimensions. Students should engage and be supported and also evaluated in such activities as gathering data, exploring, investigating, interpreting, reasoning, modeling, designing, analyzing, formulating hypotheses, using trial and error, generalizing, and checking solutions. Greater emphasis seems to have been placed on problem solving, higher order assessment goals for students that would include, for example: the ability to interpret unfamiliar texts, construct convincing arguments, understand complex systems, develop various approaches to problems, or negotiate problem resolutions in a group, etc. (Resnick & Resnick, 1992).

In different countries (i.e.: in the United States, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and lately in Quebec) education reforms have attempted to promote student critical thinking skills (Resnick and Resnick, 1992; Perrenaud, 1998; MEQ, 2000). The change in curriculum focuses on encouraging higher-order thinking and problem solving – coined the “thinking curriculum”. The thinking curriculum calls for recognition that all real learning involves thinking and that thinking can be nurtured

and cultivated in everyone. The principles that underline the reform movement further that one's thinking abilities are developed, perfected, and consolidated by increased use and feedback. Reform efforts advocate moving away from a unique basic skills curriculum toward curriculum that included the notion of learning in which students engage themselves in authentic, higher-order learning tasks (Fennimore & Tinzmnn, 1990). This important shift in the curricula requires changes in instruction, learning activities, materials, as well as assessment. Teaching and evaluating the student's thinking skills imply a profound change of attitude to education, learning, and knowledge.

It is important here to underline that this increased curriculum emphasis on thinking stems, in part, from contemporary societal changes. Changes in society have prompted a requirement for higher-order learning. Trends indicate that in order to successfully function in today's work environment individuals are required to exercise a certain level of problem solving ability, an expertise in diverse technologies, teamwork, communication skills, critical and creative thinking, as well as acceptance and respect for diverse perspectives (Tinzmnn et al, 1992). The new conceptions of learning brought about by cognitive psychologists researchers have, for another part, also contributed to help bring "the thinking movement" to the forefront of the education reform initiative. Cognitive research data indicate that learning is enhanced when, for example, students actively participate in their own learning and work to internalize the criteria for making decisions and judgments they develop; when students develop a repertoire of strategies for thinking and monitoring the process of their own learning; when they have opportunities to learn and transfer new knowledge to authentic tasks while interacting with others; and when teachers build on the strengths of what students already know; etc. (Tinzmnn et al, 1992).

Learning as an active and constructive process

Another key principle of cognitive psychology is the one that considers *learning as an active and constructive process*. Individuals are seen as active processors of information. The constructivism principle maintains that students build their knowledge by processing the information they receive by making connections between what they know and what they learn. Tardif (1998) recalls that information can be transmitted to students, but that knowledge cannot be instructed by a teacher - it can only be constructed by the learner. It appears that students show greater interest and perform at higher levels of learning when they are required to organize facts around major concepts and then actively construct their own understanding of those concepts. Students who organize and interpret information actively appear to know more about a specific topic and are able to reason more profoundly about that topic than students who don't do often so (Tardif 1998).

According to Pépin (1994) constructivist theory recognizes that students do not passively receive or copy input from teachers, but instead actively mediate it by trying to make sense of it and relate it to what they already know about the topic. Constructivist theory views the student as one who acts on objects and events within his or her environment and thereby gains some understanding of the features held by the objects and events. In order to get beyond rote memorization to achieve true understanding, students need to develop and integrate a network of associations linking new input to pre-existing knowledge and beliefs anchored in concrete experience (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Von Glasersfeld, 1989; Saunders, 1992; Désautels, 1994). Thus, teaching for understanding strives to enhance the cognitive outcomes for students such as problem solving, critical analysis, higher-order thinking, or flexible understanding of academic subject matter. The importance and necessity of assessing

the processes link to the acquisition, mastering or generalizing the different mental abilities become in such a context obvious.

Collaborative Learning

Several researchers recall that successful learning involves an interaction of the learner, the materials, the teacher, and the context (including the other students). Effective communication and collaboration are then viewed as essential to become a successful learner. It is primarily through dialogue and examining other perspectives then is own that the student become knowledgeable, strategic, self-determined, and empathetic. In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest among educators to involve students in collaboration in classrooms at all grade levels, with schools advocating cooperation as the favoured educational paradigm.

The concept of collaborative learning, the grouping and pairing of students for the purpose of achieving a complex task has been widely researched and advocated throughout the literature (Doyon, 1991; Sharan & Sharan, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Slavin, 1996). The term "collaborative learning" refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. In contrast to competition, the premise of collaborative learning is based upon exchange and consensus building through cooperation by students. Underlying nearly all collaborative learning experiences is a distinctive set of assumptions about what teaching is, what learning is, and what the nature of knowledge is. Perhaps the most pivotal of these is the assumption that knowledge is created through a real and active interaction, merely transferred from teacher to student. Dialogue and co-participation play a critical role in collaborative classrooms, and teachers strive to maintain this dialogue and this co-participation

among students. According to Tinzmann et al. (1990), the tasks offered to the groups must be complex, real (linked to student world), appropriately challenging and preferably with multiple solutions possible (open tasks).

Nelson-LeGall (1992) captures the nature of cooperative learning when she states "learning and understanding are not merely individual processes supported by the social context; rather they are the result of a continuous, dynamic negotiation between the individual and the social setting in which the individual's activity takes place. Both the individual and the social context are active and constructive in producing learning and understanding" (p.52).

Given the definition and characteristics of the collaborative learning context, it is obvious that in assessment means more than just assigning a grade. It means evaluating whether one has learned what one intended to learn (for examples: the effectiveness of learning strategies used by the group, the usefulness of the materials used in a task, the quality of products and decisions, and what kind of future learning is needed and how that learning might be realized, etc.) (Tinzmann et al, 1990). While teachers have assumed the primary responsibility for assessing student performance in the past, collaborative classrooms view assessment much more broadly. Collaborative teaching techniques utilize a variety of assessments and provide a basis for alternate forms of assessment such as observation of groups (Panitz & Panitz, 1997), group projects, group tests, or group self-assessment (Cooper, Prescott, Cook, Smith, Mueck, & Cuseo, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

In summary, according to tenets held by cognitive psychology it is not always advisable to apply standard, traditional evaluations to assess learning. In fact, the principles of cognitive psychology support the use of a number of alternative types of procedures that advocate focusing evaluation on the process of learning more than the

product in what are considered "authentic" tasks. Traditional classroom testing techniques appear to be generally incompatible with the theories and assumptions brought forth by the proponents of cognitive psychology. As such, movements have spawned that call for reforms to the ways in which students are evaluated. Other types of assessment methods have been proposed and instituted. Among these newer approaches is a category of assessments methods, as briefly mentioned earlier, referred to as alternative assessments.

1.4 Alternative assessments

As a result of some of the aforementioned drawbacks and limitations of traditional testing techniques, as well as the recent importance placed on some key principles of cognitive psychology related to the theories of teaching, learning, and assessment, a gradual shift in the way teachers are assessing their students has emerged. New expectations for school curriculum, teaching, and learning, inevitably have resulted in changes being brought about to student assessment. While traditional assessment items are still frequently used to check student knowledge of concepts and of their skills, other modes of assessment are being used to evaluate the work strategies and competencies of the students (the high order abilities called for while thinking, understanding, resolving a problem or completing a task).

In an effort to enrich curriculum to the fullest extent possible there is a move to compliment traditional tests with alternative assessments in some subjects (Ascher, 1990; Messick, 1994; Perrenoud, 1998; Legendre, 2001; Jalbert & Munn, 2001). Alternative assessments have enjoyed a certain popularity over the last decade within various education milieus. In fact, alternative assessment use is becoming increasingly popular in educational settings, especially in connection with the education reform movement (Resnick and Resnick, 1992; Perrenoud 1998, MEQ,

2000). Alternative assessments are utilized in different disciplines and with interdisciplinary approaches in various contexts. Increasingly, alternative means of assessing student performance have been explored and in many cases utilized.

1.4.1 Definition of alternative assessment

There are some varied perspectives on the meaning of alternative assessment. Alternative assessment is most often regarded as an umbrella term that embraces both performance assessment and authentic assessment (Gardner, 1992; CRESST, 1993; Wiggins, 1993). The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA, 1992) defines alternative assessments as “testing methods that require students to create an answer or product that demonstrates their knowledge and skills” (p.57). Alternative assessments generally have two parts: a clearly defined task and a list of explicit criteria for assessing student performance or product. For example, the students could be presented with a set of experiences in a particular subject domain, then given a particular task, and finally, observed to see the way in which they become engaged while resolving the task (Linn & Gronlund, 1995; Henke et al, 1999). The student performs, creates, or produces something over a sufficient duration of time to permit evaluation of either the process or the product, or ideally in both. Assessment is no longer perceived as a single event, but rather students are assessed on how they actively construct responses to complex and significant problems or tasks. Many characteristics of alternative assessment reflect the kind of activity endorsed by constructivist views of pedagogy.

Alternative assessments are best understood as a continuum of assessment formats ranging from the simplest student-constructed responses to comprehensive demonstrations or collections of work over time (Elliot, 1994). The continuum of assessment formats allows teachers to observe student behaviour ranging from simple

responses, to demonstrations, to works collected over time. In essence, the contrast between multiple-choice items and open-ended alternative tasks is not a dichotomy, but a continuum representing different degrees of structure versus openness in the allowable responses (Messick, 1994).

1.4.2 The alternative assessment task

Alternative assessments attempt to present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities: conducting research; writing, revising and discussing papers; providing an engaging oral analysis of a recent event; and collaborating with others on a debate or a complex “real-life” task. Ideas for assessment tasks can come from varied sources: a text, the curriculum, current events, literature, the arts, reference books, even everyday articles such as advertising circulars and menus (Wiggins, 1990). Ideally, the best place for teachers to start when first developing alternative assessment is with projects and activities already in use (Herman, 1997). These activities could be adapted into performance-based tasks by modifying the content, skills, and concepts to match the specific subject matter being assessed. Let us now examine in greater detail four examples of alternative assessments found in the literature.

The *station activity* is a prime example of an alternative assessment in which students actively participate in the assessment process. *Station activities* require students to use equipment to investigate a phenomenon and then answer open-ended questions about it, in order to elicit student thinking strategies. Students proceed through a series of discrete tasks, either individually or in groups with other students, in a given amount of time, much as in a science laboratory. They might be asked, for example, to measure electrical currents, sort seeds, compare the absorbency of paper products, or infer the characteristics of objects sealed in boxes. In order to elicit

student thinking strategies and to assess higher-order thinking abilities, the questions asked are open-ended which require students to explain their answers (i.e.: How have you proceeded? Why have you taken those steps? etc.) (Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Lussier-Desrochers (2005) has recently used a similar approach to identify and track competencies acquired by students participating in the «Jeunes Communicateurs Scientifiques» project.

The concept behind the so called *domain projects* is quite similar to that of station activities. With domain projects students conduct a rich set of exercises designed to explore an idea, concept, or practice central to a particular academic or artistic domain. For example, students are asked to test which paper towels are best as judged by a variety of criteria. In this task they must solve a wide range of science, math or other domain problems to set up the criteria and make their judgements.

Videotaping of performances has become increasingly popular as a form of alternative assessment. The technology is reliable and relatively inexpensive for widespread use, although its use is still relatively experimental as an assessment technique. Videotaping in the future could simplify grading when direct observation is necessary. Videotaping assessment functions by recording a student in action in a manner designed to probe understanding and thinking abilities and then scoring the performance (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; CRESST, 1997). In addition, students are increasingly being encouraged to use video cameras while performing different tasks. The videocamera in essence is becoming an increasingly viable and important tool for student learning. An analogy which illustrates this point rather interestingly is that of an athlete during the course of their training. Athletes will often review their performances on video after they have completed their particular sporting event in order to improve on their past performance. The athlete learns by discussing, analyzing, and breaking down the sequence of their actions as observed in different

real situations. They learn to appreciate where they may have erred and reasons for these mistakes and discuss (often with their coach) ways of improving on their performance.

The use of *portfolios* is another method of alternative assessment that is used to assess student attainments over a period of time. Often referred to as a “process-folio”, portfolios contain full process-tracing records of a student’s involvement in one or more works of a particular subject. Students collect their best work over a period of time, select (by himself or with the collaboration of the teacher) a sample of the collection that they think best represents their capabilities, and submit this portfolio of works for evaluation (Jalbert, 1997; Goupil, Petit, & Pallascio, 1998; Aubin-Lussier, 2000). Portfolios allow for the collection of information related to growth of a student over time, and permits teachers and other educators to obtain a record relatively complete of student growth. Portfolios might consist partially of tests and partly of naturally occurring records. A number of different models of portfolio assessment have been advocated, with differing views on what constitutes a portfolio. Examples of portfolios include: initial plans, drafts, early evaluations, self-evaluations, feedback from teachers and peers, collections of works which the student likes/dislikes, reasons for reactions, records of final work, relevant comments, and plans for subsequent work (Pandey, 1990; Gardner, 1992; Ysseldyke and Olsen, 1999). Teachers may choose to assess a variety of dimensions including: number of entries, richness of entry, degree of reflection shown, improvement in skill, achievement of one’s goals, interplay of production, perception, reflections, responsiveness to internal and external feedback, and development of themes (Jalbert, 1997; Goupil et al, 1998; Aubin-Lussier, 2000).

Portfolios use has become quite popular in today’s classroom (Henke, Chen and Goldman, 1999). A recent American study found that forty-nine percent (49%)

of teachers felt that portfolios were very important (Henke, Chen and Goldman, 1999). The teachers in the study included a variety of items in these portfolios, namely: homework, tests, quizzes, worksheets, projects, and self-evaluations. Primary teachers were almost thirty percent (30%) more likely than secondary teachers to consider portfolio items as possible grades.

1.4.3 General features of alternative assessment

The literature appears to highlight several common features of alternative assessments independent of their format. These main features are: *emphasis on performance* rather than selection of a response; the use of *contextualized, authentic problems* to assess student competencies; and the assessment of *critical thinking and problem solving abilities*.

1.4.3.1 Emphasis on performance

Alternative assessment is a dynamic process calling for students to be active participants, who are learning even while they are being assessed. Alternative assessment tasks elicit information in the course of ordinary student performance. Assessment normally occurs unobtrusively during the course of daily activities (Gardner, 1992; Perrenoud, 1998). An alternative assessment offers students an integrated challenge in which knowledge and judgement must be used in an innovative fashion to demonstrate a quality product or performance. Alternative assessments show whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances, or products on specific tasks. Teachers measure students' performance on "rich" situational problems that require subject-related thinking in pursuit of a result that has meaning to the student (Pandey, 1990).

In alternative assessments students are often asked to perform open-ended tasks that are directly related to the skills being assessed. Students are active participants, who construct responses to complex and significant tasks. Moreover, alternative assessment contends to use direct judgements and evaluations of performances (with the assistance of predefined criteria) rather than indirect indicators of competence, as is often the case with traditional testing methods (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Messick, 1994). For example, during the assessment process, teachers work collaboratively with students to determine whether they have developed the required competencies, whether they have used the best or most adapted strategies, or whether they have mastered the gamut of strategies useful in solving the problems or proposed tasks. The teacher's judgment is based on a set of observations of student performance compiled while they were observing the student's way of organizing his actions. With this information, it is presumed that teachers can provide a much more accurate picture of student progress and of what they have actually learned or mastered better, teachers are than able summarize the strengths and weaknesses of each student and then to make the necessary adjustments along the way to help students improve.

1.4.3.2 Assessment as authentic

An assumption that is at the foundation of alternative assessment is that it focuses on authentic skills and on assessing student's abilities in a real life environment (Wiggins, 1990; Ysseldyke and Olsen, 1999). In contrast to standardized tests, qualified as having "predictive validity," assessments in context are described as having "ecological validity". That is, students perform as they would have to in real life (Ascher, 1990). While some alternative assessments are mainly meaningful to students in an academic context, most educators aim to develop the assessment tasks so that they are authentic. As a general definition, authentic refers

to the degree in which the assessment is relevant and representative of “real world” problems or issues (Elliot, 1994; Wiggins, 1993). Students experience questions and working conditions under constraints as they typically and “naturally” occur (i.e., contextualized problems). Students are expected to relate their learning and assessment to real-life experiences (Messick, 1994). Like “real life”, where most of the important problems faced are open-ended and complex, alternative assessments require each student to demonstrate mastery and competency in a personal and more integrated way than standardized tests (Ascher, 1990).

Emphasizing the real-life context of alternative assessment tasks, teachers frequently encourage group or team work. According to Gardner (1992a) group assessments encourage co-operative learning, collaboration, and mutual feedback. To complete the tasks, students have access to the tools that are usually available for solving such problems in real life situations. Similar tasks may likely to be encountered by professionals, citizens, or consumers.

1.4.3.3 Critical thinking and problem solving

A hallmark of alternative assessment is their focus on higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills (Gardner, 1992; Baker, O’Neil, & Linn, 1993; CRESST, 1993). Alternative evaluations are to be used to assess knowledge application, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving proficiencies. Moreover, the assessments try to tap the complex structuring of multiple skills and knowledge, including high-order skills, embedded in realistic or otherwise rich problem contexts that require extended or demanding forms of reasoning and judgement (Messick, 1994; Geocaris & Ross, 1999). Alternative assessment use provides students an opportunity to think for themselves, construct their own responses (instead of choosing a single answer), demonstrate the depth of their understanding of a problem, formulate problems,

devise solutions, interpret results, critical thinking, and encourages problem solving as they work their way through the assessment (Pandey, 1990).

1.4.4 Advantages and benefits of alternative assessment use

According to the literature one of the greatest advantages of alternative assessments is that they are sensitive to individual differences, developmental levels, diversity of intelligences and forms of student expertise (Ysseldyke and Olsen, 1999). The varying assessment methods inherent in alternative assessment suit different learning styles, and provide students with choices to demonstrate what they know how they learn and how they can use, in different contexts, the things already learned or mastered in a specific context. The assessments can be administered to students who have a unique array of educational goals and experiences. The use of alternative assessment helps to individualize the learning environment for all students. Geocaris and Ross (1999) assert that students, for their part, are better able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the content if assessment allows students to express their knowledge in ways that best suit their learning styles and intelligences. Moreover, because of its compatibility, teachers can utilize alternative assessments with a student population that differ greatly in their abilities to respond to stimuli, solve problems, and provide responses. If appropriately constructed and administered, alternative assessments can meet the needs of diverse student learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and proficiency levels (Gardner, 1992a).

Of the many benefits students derive from being evaluated using an alternative assessment method, one of the most advantageous benefits is the useful and continuous feedback it provides (Gardner, 1992a; Herman, 1997). Alternative assessment can provide usable, diagnostic feedback of the strengths and weaknesses of student performance. Ideally, the assessment acts like a silent mentor to the

students. Moreover, while engaged in alternative tasks, students are encouraged to use the process of self-monitoring. Generally, alternative tasks are conceived in ways to allow students to learn even while being assessed. The assessment is designed not merely to audit performance, but also to improve future achievement.

Alternative assessments provide teachers with input on student competencies and progress. In addition, it supplies teachers with rich data on student understanding, their use of the “tools” of the discipline and their subject competency level (Herman, 1997). Teachers are able to examine student demonstration of knowledge and understanding from the process and the results (Geocaris & Ross, 1999). The assessments allow teachers to observe student behaviour ranging from simple responses to demonstrations of work collected over time (i.e., complete records of student growth). Teachers report that alternative assessment use as being beneficial to their teaching practices (Aschbacher, 1994). Lastly, Gardner (1992a) found that when teachers are better aware of student progress and difficulties in the large domain of the higher order abilities, they appear to make better decisions about content and modes of instruction in needed to be use.

Finally, alternative assessment use may take generally more of a teacher’s time than traditional testing techniques. However, numerous authors contend the time spent on assessment is directly relevant to the instructional efforts on the quality of student thinking and reasoning (Pandey, 1990; Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Furthermore, they affirm that the gains to teacher professional development, assessing, and student learning, far outweigh the time constraint issue.

1.4.5 Disadvantages of alternative assessment use

While alternative assessments offer numerous benefits, they are still subject to several problems, flaws, and potential challenges. Many educators, researchers, and laypersons are skeptical about these forms of assessment and question their validity.

A review of the research “against” the use of alternative assessment practices reveals that the issue that garners the greatest criticism is the apparent subjective nature of the assessment. Some critics of alternative assessment view such subjectivity of scoring to be the bane of this method of assessment (Stiggins, 1991; Messick 1994). While traditional tests are scored on the basis of “objective” notions of right and wrong answers, alternative-based assessments often entail human judgements. Constructed responses by teachers are a defining feature of alternative assessment. Herman (1997) contends that if an assessment rendered by a teacher reflects the teacher’s idiosyncrasies or biases as much as the skills and abilities of the student who is being assessed, the assessment will not well represent the student’s capability. Therefore, assessments run the risk that their measures of student performance may be biased. When not properly constructed, assessments could easily embody stereotypes and pose situations or problems that are likely to be more familiar to some students than to others. In addition, because alternative assessments are often scored by teachers exercising human judgement, assessment of student performance could be influenced by irrelevant factors such as the gender, race, prior academic achievement, disciplinary patterns, or the socio-economic background of the student.

Aschbacher (1994), for his part, notes the concerns about the burden, the pressure, and the pervasive demands alternative assessments place on teachers and

schools. The author maintains that the time factor involved in alternative assessment use can impede its utilization. In many cases, teachers would have to become familiar with these relatively new assessments and their administration. Teachers would then have to understand how tasks are developed, discern, and apply criteria for assessing student work. Finally, teachers would also be required to develop the content and pedagogical knowledge they need to change their practice and reflect upon and fine-tune their instructional and assessment practices. These demands and the professional efforts they require represent both important and significant costs, which may deter feasibility and usage of alternative assessments.

According to Messick (1994) the assessment challenge of alternative assessment revolves around issues relating to the difficulties of generalizing from performance on specific tasks to inferences about student capability in a broader domain. Herman (1997) reports that problems in the content and substance of alternative assessments may limit their coverage of fundamental academic content, thus limiting a teacher's ability to generalize about student learning. Wiggins (1990) contends that teachers, under pressure to complete the assessment tasks, may fail to adequately assess student capacities and outcomes by limiting the number of tasks needed to arrive at an accurate estimate of student achievement in a particular subject domain. A reliable amount of tasks, as well as the breadth and depth of curriculum coverage is needed in order to obtain a fairly reliable portrait of student competency.

It is clear from the literature that efforts must be made to inform and train teachers regarding novel evaluative approaches, such as the increased use of alternative assessments. In addition, momentum within the educational world appears to be building to support curriculum modifications and changes to student evaluative practices. The recent education reforms, including the reforms currently underway

within the Quebec school system, attempt to promote and to sustain the implementation of these efforts.

1.5 Education reforms

Given the new assumptions brought by the cognitive psychologists as well as the limitations of traditional assessment for the evaluation of student competencies, both instruction and assessment have been the focus of reform initiatives. The movement toward different methods of instruction and forms of assessment than reflects recent learning and pedagogical assumption. These assumptions have contributed to bringing about “new trends in evaluation” and have called for modifications to classroom assessment practices. The changes in learning philosophy underscore a changing view of what and how students should learn, and the types of assessments that should be used to measure student progress and achievement.

The education reform movement has become quite popular throughout North America and in many European countries (e.g. France, Belgium, and Switzerland) in the past ten years. Schools and educators have begun to look at alternative ways of teaching students the skills and basic knowledge that are necessary in order to function productively in our ever-changing society. Several states and provinces in the U.S and Canada have recently completely or partially modified their curriculum, at the same time teachers have adopted new methods of teaching and assessing their students (Conrod, 1999; Thurlow, 2000).

It is clear that the reforms, be it in Quebec or elsewhere, propose fundamental changes in the design and content of programs, in teaching approaches, in the way achievement is evaluated, and in the working lives of all school personnel. The reforms generally aim to better enable students to acquire knowledge and develop

basic competencies that will be useful to them in everyday life. Education reforms attempt to ensure that schools are more responsive to the needs of their students and better able to help them succeed.

In addition, a core idea of the reforms is that schools and school communities must assume decision-making responsibilities in regard to student learning and assessment. Schools are now given more autonomy. Where once the educational agenda was solely the mandate of government agencies, schools and school boards are now being asked to play a greater role in deciding what and how students learn, and how they are evaluated. So for all these reasons, the timing is good to inform teachers in related matters or to support the new initiatives undertaken.

With each new round of reform, assessment theory and practice have been refined and elaborated. Before we briefly explore the Quebec education reform efforts currently underway, it would be important to examine a few key educational concepts, terms, and themes which have been brought to light through the education reform movements and which has been discussed by certain experts in the field of curriculum development and student evaluation.

1.5.1 Main approaches of the reform efforts

Three major elements deserve to be reviewed considering their importance and their direct connection to the general theme of our research study – the evaluation of students within the school system.

Competency-based approach

Until recently, academic programs have focused almost exclusively on subject-specific knowledge and on the students' ability to memorize information. Some reform efforts call for a competency-based approach to be used in schools. The competency-based approach calls for new ways of supporting students throughout the learning process and evaluating their work. Students are thought of as acquiring competencies¹ in various subjects and skills (competencies in the intellectual domain as well as the methodological and communication fields, in self-knowledge, and in activities of daily living). According to the authors in the field, the competencies are at best developed and mastered in class situations closely related to authentic tasks that mirror the complexities and realities of life. In essence, students must acquire or demonstrate progress in various cross curricular competencies (ex.: intellectual, methodological, communication, etc.) as well as competencies in a great number of school subjects (math, science, languages, etc.). It is hoped, as well as being expected, that once students have been exposed to various learning situations in different and varied contexts that allow them to acquire various competencies, that they will then be able to apply them in other learning situations and in various ways if need be.

The competency approach aims at preparing students to be active and thoughtful students in the present as well as active and thoughtful citizens and workers in the future. While the student is in school, the competency-based approach aims at taking into account each student's academic situation, at closely monitoring the rate at which each one learns, and allowing teachers to design activities during the learning process that induce and reflect student progress.

¹ Generally speaking the term competency refers to an individual's ability to gain a certain level of aptitude and/or proficiency in a wide range of abilities.

It is clear for the proponents of the competency-based approach that students cannot develop competencies without attaining knowledge in various fields (Tardif, 1992; Perrenoud, 1998). Indeed the approach emphasizes learning and understanding and not mere memorization of facts, data or theories. Hence, by developing numerous competencies (be it in the intellectual, methodological, social or personal domains), students acquire not only the tools that will help them to deal with complex situations but also become familiar with new concepts related to different situations worked on.

Child-centred approach

In years past, curriculum was essentially driven by a content-centred approach. Content-centred approach refers to a curriculum organized around the knowledge to be mastered in each subject matter according to grade level as defined by curriculum experts (e.g. specialists in mathematics, science, French, etc.). Teachers are guided in their instruction by breaking down the subject matter to be taught. Evaluation is a measurement of the extend to which the student has mastered the learned content (knowledge, rules, principles, theories, etc.).

The new reforms tend to favour a curriculum primarily driven by a child-centred approach. A dense amount of research and data has come out supporting the principle of child-centred learning (Tardif, 1992; CRESST, 1997; Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 1999). The authors' attest to the important role child-centred education can play in creating an environment where children can learn under very favourable conditions. A child centred classroom is organized around the principle that children learn best by following their own personal interests and goals. The teacher's role in a child centred classroom is to provide engaging materials and to help children's

natural development by sharing control with children, focusing on their strengths, forming close relationships, supporting children's play ideas, and adopting a problem solving approach. In a child-centred approach students are actively engaged in the learning process. It is presumed that by encouraging students to play an active role in their education they will take a greater interest in school and be more motivated to learn. Students are seen as proactive participants in the learning process.

Child-centered principles promote differentiated teaching, where teachers accommodate a range of different approaches appropriate to the task and the situation. It does not exclude direct teaching by the teacher. In fact, direct teaching happens as much in a classroom where students are applying their learning as it does in a classroom where teachers lecture. The premise is that students learn much more and acquire longer-lasting knowledge if they concentrate on situations that motivate them, instead of being presented with a large number of topics and receiving only lecture style instruction (Tardif, 1992). Thus, learning is perceived as a balance of modeling, action and reflection. For example, the evaluation will be done much more in terms of progress made since the last evaluation by the student, than in terms of assessing the amount of knowledge a student has obtained since the introduction of a new module, topic, or subject matter in class.

Collaborative learning

Another principle of the educational reform is the emphasis and importance that is being placed on collaborative learning. Collaborative learning, as briefly mentioned earlier, is strongly embedded in the general category of social learning. Influential authors such as Bandura (1971) and Vygotsky (1978), for example, have extensively discussed the important role that socialization (both between people and contexts) has on how children learn.

Today, the collaborative learning movement ascertains that the educational activities in the classroom should accentuate the collaboration both between peers as well as between the learner (i.e. the student) and the “guide” (i.e. the teacher). Collaborative work reflects the dynamics encountered in the real world in which numerous tasks are completed by teams grouped together with varying talents and with diversified competencies. Collaborative work is also seen as a way of limiting the potential negative effects of student competition amongst themselves. In today’s ever changing world of education the notion of learning communities is very much in vogue, as is the development and expression of the collective intelligence (Aubé, 1998, 2002).

In the various contexts embedding collaborative learning students learn to cooperate in carrying out a task, planning an activity, or completing a complex project. They are equally confronted to the fact that working together is more fun, productive, exciting, and stimulating than working alone. The literature is quite clear with respects to the impact of the collaborative approach in instruction (Tinzmann et al, 1990; Doyon, 1991; Gokhale, 1995). The approach is seen as favouring the development of various attributes such as: mutual respect, trust, tolerance, self-regulation, discipline, critical thinking, etc. Furthermore, working together on classroom projects provides students with different perspectives and opportunities to investigate subject matter at varying levels, justify and defend their ideas, and build deep and solid knowledge. The collaborative learning approach requires obvious changes in the way students are evaluated if only to provide a place to the behaviors and competencies associated with collaborative work. It is clear that the evaluation of individual knowledge on a particular subject matter is not sufficient nor appropriate in this case.

1.5.2 The Quebec education reform

The new visions brought forth by the researchers in cognitive psychology, as well as the winds of change resulting from the various educational reforms across many countries have influenced educational reform efforts currently underway in Quebec. As outlined in the Quebec Ministry of Education policy statement entitled “Quebec Schools on Course: A New Direction for Success” (MEQ, 1997) the main focus of the actual educational reform are a revision of the curriculum, changes in the educational options and paths offered to students, and an exploration of ways of evaluating students.

The reform movement in Quebec attempts to bring about a fundamental change to both the instruction and assessment practices of teachers. The shift involves redefining the goal of education, from “access for as many as possible to that of educational success for as many as possible” (MEQ, 1997). Lecture style teaching still has its place, but increasingly more use is made of other approaches involving greater participation on the part of the students. The reform emphasizes the teaching of skills/competencies with less emphasis on the memorization of facts. The reform advocates learning through competencies in a familiar cyclical context (ex. cycle 1, cycle 2, etc.) and proposes the use of new forms of evaluation that attempt to compliment certain evaluative practices currently being used in the classroom. Being that a principle theme of our research is the evaluation of students, particular attention is allocated to the documents produced by the Ministry of Education with respects to this area of focus.

1.5.2.1 The evaluation policy under the Quebec education reform

Evaluation of student learning in Quebec has gone through three main periods in its evolution: evaluation of knowledge acquisition, evaluation of the degree of mastery of specified objectives, and evaluation of competencies. Since the publication of the *General Policy for Educational Evaluation* in 1981, significant changes have taken place in the evaluation practices used by teachers.

As outlined in the 90-page *Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning* (MEQ, 2000), several key areas of the Quebec education policy for the evaluation of student learning, established in 1981, were updated in the current education reform. The policy is the result of a process carried out over 1997-2000, which involved consultations with representatives from the education community. Representatives were from both the English and French sectors, and the public and private system. Representatives included heads of educational services at school boards, coordinators, school principals, teachers, educational consultants, parents, university professors and representatives from the departments concerned within the Quebec Ministry of Education (Krakow, 2000).

The policy outlines the government's policy on grades and evaluation in the new reform. The main objectives of this policy specify the values, orientations, principles and guidelines governing the evaluation of competencies, the recognition of competencies, and the recognition of prior scholastic and experiential learning. A further objective reaffirms the importance of evaluation and the necessity of ensuring consistency with programs of study. The policy promotes ongoing evaluation as a daily tool to encourage the development of competencies in students. Lastly, the evaluation of student learning is described as a process that requires teachers to make a judgment about the development and acquisition of competencies in order to make decisions about student performance.

1.5.2.2 Principles of student evaluation under the Quebec education reform

The *Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning* (MEQ, 2000) attempts to align student assessment with the new curriculum introduced. It is clear, from the perspective of the advocates, that the evaluation of student learning is an important means by which to achieve of the main goals of the education reform. The policy envisions that student evaluation shall follow a multi-dimensional model, which takes into account the cognitive, socio-affective and psycho-sensori-motor aspects of learning. The policy also proposes that the interpretation of the evaluations shall be criterion-referenced, a way of measuring the degree to which a student has mastered a particular competency. Finally, it is recommended that the gains or progress observed be mainly in reference to each student (i.e. “self-comparison”).

According to the principles brought forth in the evaluation policy, schools are encouraged to place a greater emphasize on assessment of student learning throughout and at the end of each cycle of elementary and secondary school. The policy maintains that evaluation in the course of learning and at the end of the cycle is different but complementary. Evaluation in the course of the cycle is an integral part of the learning process. This evaluation provides the student and teacher with information on the student’s progress and on any remedial measures that may be required. The evaluation has less to do with the end result-what the student learned- than with the process of learning. Evaluation carried out during the development of competencies should focus on the learning strategies used by the students in order to obtain the end result. On the other hand, end-of-cycle evaluation focuses on the teacher’s assessment of the degree to which the student has attained the competency. The end-of-cycle evaluation allows a decision to be made as to whether the student should be permitted to continue to the next cycle.

In the context of the new reform, teachers are expected to place a greater emphasis on using novel ways of assessing student work during the course of a semester. Students overall grade shall be increasingly based on a variety of criteria such as their test marks, their ability to work in groups, the quality of their performance on activities/tasks, their creativity, and numerous other aspects of class learning. The reform deviates away from measuring student success purely on their marks in objective class tests. The criterion of progress is not solely the attainment of good marks but also the progress made in student performance and acquired competencies.

During the assessment process, the evaluation policy advocates that teachers encourage students to become involved and take on responsibility in evaluating the development of a competency. The policy contends that evaluation of a student's learning must allow students to reflect on his or her learning strategies. The assessment process is intended to assist students with their learning by providing feedback to guide students in modifying their learning strategies.

In summary, according to the *Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning* (MEQ, 2000), the evaluation of the acquisition of competencies must focus on the performance of an individual student and be based on information gathered at different times and in different contexts. In addition, the evaluation of the acquisition of a competency must draw on the methods and strategies used in simple or complex contextualized tasks. Finally, the evaluation of the development or acquisition of competencies must provide an opportunity to verify whether the student can apply the knowledge and competencies to perform a task within or outside the school setting. At the end of a cycle, evaluation must focus on the degree to which the competencies have been acquired.

The *Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning* (MEQ, 2000) also reports that the criticism directed at objective (traditional) forms of examinations is serious enough to warrant looking for a better balance between this type of examination and other types which require that students write comprehensive and pertinent texts; explain clearly and precisely their ideas, conceptions, and theories regarding different scientific, social or literary phenomenon; justify adequately their opinions; organize themselves (often with others) to find a solution to an encountered situation; or demonstrate an understanding and explain possible solutions to particular challenging problems. The MEQ contends that teachers shall place greater emphasis and attention on these “new” forms of assessments in years to come.

It appears that, through their evaluation policy, the ministry of education is envisioning examining and recommending the increased use of alternative assessments. Indeed there seems to be several links between what the Ministry proposes and what was already proposed by authors who are considered experts in the field of alternative assessment (ex: Wiggins, 1990; Gardner, 1992b; Tardif, 1992).

1.6 Research questions

The review of the literature presented earlier highlights the need for the creation and the use of new and varied evaluation methods to compliment traditional testing techniques. Moreover, numerous educational reform movements have initiated changes in the way students are evaluated or have, at the least, encouraged diversity with regards to student evaluation methods. The current Quebec education reform is no different. It has placed emphasis on revamping teacher evaluative practices, and as such has proposed assessment practices that deal with various levels of student competencies.

Quebec teachers were consulted and some had been involved in the planning committees for the education reform. Indeed, involving teachers in the development and implementation process has been shown to have a variety of positive effects on classroom teaching and learning (Aschbacher, 1994). These include raising teachers' expectations, encouraging teachers to rethink their roles, adapting their teaching strategies, supporting more active learning and nurturing reflective practices.

In the spirit of the Quebec education reforms, the teachers who are already involved in the reform efforts (ex. teachers in the elementary school level) should have, in parallel with the use of traditional testing methods, already adopted the use of new methods of evaluation in association with the proposed reforms. According to Legendre (2001) and Tardif (2005) numerous Quebec teachers have already created innovative assessment measures as they become aware of recent research findings and the growing diversity in their classrooms. It seems, therefore, according to the literature (i.e. since the beginning of the educational reform here in Quebec several editions of the provincial educational journal, *Vie Pédagogique*, have explored the different ways that teachers are working with their students and the how they are following their progress) that numerous teachers have embodied the reform efforts and more specifically the new forms of evaluation methods.

However, it must be said, that there is still in the Québec teaching community, much debate surrounding the types of assessment students should receive. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that here, like elsewhere, as Saranson (1999) discusses quite poignantly, is the resistance to change. In a context in which new initiatives are being implemented, on the one hand, and where staunch resistance to change is present, on the other hand, it appeared important to us to provide a sort of "progress report" on the state of student evaluation several years after the start of the education reforms in Quebec. What are presently the perceptions of Quebec teachers, what are their actual

practices, with regards to student assessment? Our research study attempts to answer these questions by exploring the perceptions and evaluative practices of some teachers. This initial study is obviously intended to be part of a larger and more exhaustive effort by various researchers to transcribe et clarify the perceptions and practices of Quebec teacher with regards to student evaluation. Our contribution to the research efforts will obviously be humble and limited, but it nevertheless will be a starting point for research on this important topic. It is our hope that the answers provided in this study will offer a “first” portrait of perceptions and practices of Quebec teachers with regards to student evaluation, and that our research study will provide ideas to enquiring colleagues that may wish to continue and elaborate on the work we have started.

1.6.1 General objective of the research study

Taking into account both the importance accorded in the literature to the development of diversified and innovative forms of student evaluation as well as the environment by which Québec’s teachers in elementary schools now find themselves in, it has appeared relevant and interesting to us to provide a type of progress report on the perceptions and evaluative practices of teachers who have worked within the framework of the Quebec educational reform for the past years.

1.6.2 Specific objectives of the research study

In accordance with the general objective, three specific objectives have been retained:

- 1) To document the student assessment practices most commonly used during the year by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in two subjects: Language Arts (French or English), and Math.
- 2) To explore the student assessment perceptions held by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers.
- 3) To assess the knowledge, perceptions, and willingness of Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in the use of various forms of alternative assessments in different learning situations.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The second chapter presents an outline of the methodology used for the present study. Details pertaining to the solicitation and participation of subjects and the methods in which the participating schools and teachers were solicited will be discussed. In addition, the instrument that was developed, the research procedures used for the validation, the pre-experimentation and the experimentation of the questionnaire are presented in this chapter. Lastly, the ethical considerations associated with this research study are highlighted.

2.1 Subjects

2.1.1 The population solicited

A sample of approximately a hundred elementary cycle 1 and 2, English, French and Math teachers affiliated with the Lester B Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and the Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal were solicited to take part in the study. Only Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 teachers were solicited because at the time of the experiment stage (fall 2003-winter 2004), cycle 3 teachers had not yet been formally part of the reforms². In addition, only those teachers teaching core subjects (languages and mathematics) were solicited, as the evaluations of students in these subjects were judged to be of primary importance both from an academic and

² The reform was phased into the third cycle of elementary school in the 2004-2005 school year.

ministerial standpoint. Furthermore, only English schools were approached to participate in this study: schools affiliated with the Lester B Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and the Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal. Lastly, the choice to focus on English-speaking schools and to include several Jewish schools was due, largely in part, to the scarcity of data available on English-speaking Quebec teachers. While this clientele may not be as numerous as their counterparts from the French sector, nevertheless this is an important subject group that needs to be recognized and studied. In addition, the researcher's familiarity and interest in this cohort of teachers also influenced the decision to undertake research in this milieu.

Of the one hundred teachers solicited, 65 responded positively and chose to participate in the research. This rate of subject participation (i.e. 65%) was deemed satisfactory considering the relatively substantial requirements imposed on the subjects (e.g. an availability of around 60 minutes outside of class time). The research statistician consulted confirmed that a sample size of 65 respondents was deemed to be statistically appropriate. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of teachers partaking in the study teach in one of the Jewish schools in Montreal, while the remaining forty three percent (43%) are employed in different English schools that are part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Other characteristics of the participating population are presented in section 3.2 of chapter III.

In total eleven schools accepted to partake in the research study; five schools from the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB)³ and six schools from the

³ Lester B Pearson School Board (LBPSB) schools that participated in the study: Westpark, Hurbert Purcell, Beechwood, Seignoury, and Springgarden.

Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal took part in the study⁴. The LBPSB has 45 primary schools that have a student enrollment of close to 15,000 students. The schools in its network serve a multicultural, multi-racial, and multi-religious community and aims to provide every student with a learning environment that is positive, challenging and inclusive. Its schools offer a wide variety of programs to meet the different needs of its student population. In addition, many of its schools offer enriched extra-curricular and co-curricular programs.

The Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal has approximately 4,000 students enrolled in its 8 primary schools. While each school is specific in its educational philosophy, each one is committed to the academic, social, moral and psychological growth of its students. As such, the schools strive to help its students reach their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual potential while meeting the needs of its school community.

The solicited population of teachers works in the Anglophone network of schools. Nevertheless, the study pools a diverse cross-section of participants in regards to gender, age, socio-economic status, and years of teaching experience. Subjects chosen for this study are comprised of language arts teachers (English and French) and mathematics teachers from cycles 1 and 2 of elementary school.

2.1.2 The methods of school and teacher solicitation

In each of the 11 participating schools, a brief presentation was made to the cycle 1 and cycle 2 teaching staff during a scheduled staff meeting in order to explain

⁴ Independent Jewish day Schools of Montreal schools that participated in the study: Jewish Peoples School and Peretz School (Cote-Saint-Luc and Snowdon campuses), Maimonides (Ville St. Laurent and Cote-St. Luc campuses), Akiva, and United Talmud Torah (Ville St. Laurent campus)

the goals and procedures of the study. Teachers were then allotted time to ask questions and make comments should they have had specific concerns.

Teachers were also informed of the objectives of the study by a letter placed in their boxes in the teacher's lounge (Appendix A). If teachers were interested in participating, they were invited to tear off the participation slip at the end of the letter and place it in the examiner's box in the teacher's lounge. Those teachers interested in taking part in the study were requested to provide times during the day that the examiner could contact them to further discuss the study and set up a time to administer the questionnaire.

2.2 Instrumentation

A questionnaire was constructed specifically for the present research study. The elaboration of the questionnaire was inspired a) by the literature reviewed in the first chapter. Specifically the information pertaining to the evaluation of students (Gardner, 1992a; Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Wiggins, 1993), b) by the objectives of this study (see section 1.5.2 of chapter 1), and c) by similar instruments created by other researchers (Carruthers, 1990; Bolduc, 1998; Pianta, Bunosky, Fitz, Hamre, Kraft-Sayre & Steinberg, 1999)

The Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions Questionnaire is designed to assess the classroom evaluative practices and perceptions of teachers, with particular emphasis placed on the theme of alternative assessments. The format of the survey is mainly that of a semi-structured interview. Thus, the questionnaire serves as a kind of guide during the interview and ensures that the same information is obtained from the different subjects. The interview was conducted with a fairly open framework that allowed for focused, conversational, two-way communication.

Within the list of topic or subject areas, the interviewer pursued certain questions in greater depth and had the flexibility of probing for details or discussing certain issues. The interview portion of the survey was recorded by audiocassette. In addition, there are also several Likert-type scales that the teachers were asked to complete by checking off the most appropriate answer.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts, an introduction and two parts that touch upon the themes discussed in the theoretical section of this study. The questionnaire that was used in the study is presented in Appendix B.

The *Introduction* part of the questionnaire is meant to gather general information about the teacher such as their gender, age, years of teaching experience, the grades and subjects that they teach, and their highest level of formal education completed.

The first section, *Student Assessment*, focuses on the student assessment practices and perceptions of teachers. This section, divided into two parts, is comprised of 14 questions. The first part, (A) Assessment Practices, identifies the classroom assessment practices most often used by Math and English and /or French teachers with their students (11 questions). The second part, (B) Assessment Perceptions, gauges the perceptions and the fundamental principles on which teacher assessment practices have been established (3 questions). In this part questions are both in the form of Likert scales as well as open-end reflection-type questionnaires (verbal responses that were tape recorded).

The second section, *Alternative Assessment*, addresses teacher knowledge and perceptions with regards to alternative assessment methods. The section also assesses the level of training teachers have had using alternative types of assessment. The

nine questions in this section are divided into three subsections: (A) Traditional vs. Alternative Assessment, (B) Training, and (C) General Reflections. The first part (A) is comprised of three questions. The first question relates to the definition of the terms traditional and alternative assessment. The second and third questions, in Likert-scale format, pertain to the perception of teachers with regards to the various features of both traditional and alternative assessment. Teachers are asked to check off the most appropriate answers. The second part of the section (B) is comprised of four questions. Two Likert-scales assess the amount and types of training teachers have received using alternative assessments. The third question deals with the type of alternative assessment training teachers feel they would benefit from in the future. The fourth question asks teachers to expand on the type of alternative assessment training they received in the past. Finally, the last subsection (C) includes three general reflective questions that explore teacher use and perception of alternative assessment. In this last section, teachers discuss their answers with the interviewer.

2.3 Research procedures

Once constructed, the questionnaire was distributed to different experts for validation. Modifications to the questionnaire were conducted based on the feedback from the experts. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire to the subjects in study, the questionnaire was administrated to a small number of teachers during a pre-experiment stage. Each of these stages is briefly described in the following paragraphs. The ethical conditions associated with the research are discussed at the end of the chapter

Validation of the questionnaire by the experts

The initial questionnaire was sent to ten experts for validation. These experts were selected from diverse backgrounds and expertise. For example, they included two researchers who are experienced in validation of questionnaires; one researcher specializing in the study of alternative assessment use; three researchers whose field of study includes aspects of the current Quebec education reforms; one school professional experienced in student evaluation and three teachers from various schools familiar with the use of different types of assessment. An evaluation sheet was forwarded to the panel of experts in order to assist them in the feedback process (please refer to appendix C). Upon receiving the comments from the experts, modifications to the questionnaire were undertaken based on their feedback.

Pre-experimentation

The refined questionnaire was presented to five teachers working with Cycle 1 or Cycle 2 students. Interviews with the participating teachers followed the completion of the questionnaire. The goals of the interview were to assess teacher concerns regarding: the clarity of the questionnaire, the length of the questionnaire, possible missing or repetitive questions, and their general feelings with regards to the pertinence of the subject matter. The questionnaire was then modified based on the comments of the teachers. The final version of the questionnaire that was used during the experimentation phase is the one presented in Appendix B.

Experimentation

The Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions Questionnaire was administered individually to each of the 65 teachers in a room provided by the respective schools. The completion of the questionnaire took approximately 40-50 minutes. The examiner was present throughout the completion of the questionnaire. Teacher responses for most of the questions were obtained verbally by recording the answers using an audiocassette recorder.

2.3.1 Ethical considerations

The confidentiality of the collected data and the anonymity of all the participants were assured. As previously mentioned, a letter outlining in detail the nature and objectives of the study was placed in the box of each teacher in the staff room prior to the commencement of the study (Appendix A). Before completing the questionnaire the teachers were required to sign a consent form (Appendix D). Teacher participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and as such the teachers were under no obligation to participate in the study. The participants were also informed that they could decline to participate in the study or refrain from answering specific questions without penalty. The participants were informed that their responses to some of the questions were going to be taped.

Once all the questionnaires were collected the information was entered into a data entry program and the respondents were assigned a code so as to ensure participant anonymity. The same procedure applied for the transcription of the audiocassettes. The questionnaires and audiocassettes were kept under lock and key in a university laboratory and will be kept there until they are destroyed in five years.

Only the researcher of the study had access to the questionnaires and audiotapes during the data entry process.

The participants in the study were advised in writing that the results of the study could be published or presented in various milieus such as conferences or workshops. Under no circumstance will the data reveal the identity of the respondents, and only group data will be presented. Finally, if teacher citations are used to better illustrate a particular point, all measures will be taken to ensure that the identity of the respondents remains confidential.

Finally, it was specified that each school would be provided with a written summary of the research findings and that a feedback session could be offered to the participating schools should they so desire.

CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 Plan of analysis

As previously indicated, the general objective of this study is to explore the perceptions and practices of some Quebec teachers with regards to student assessment approximately two years after the onset of the Quebec education reforms. The analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. Both the written and the verbal (transcribed) portions of the questionnaire are analyzed. Essentially, the presentation of the results is descriptive in nature. The distribution of responses in terms of frequency for each question is presented.

For the questions using Likert Scales, the analysis will consist of a compilation (frequency and percentages) of responses in each category. The analysis of the verbal explanations and comments provided by teachers requires firstly that an analysis of the content be undertaken in order to identify the major response categories. The method of content analysis used is based on the guidelines and procedures outlined in several respected data analysis publications (Weber, 1990; Banister, 1997; Esterberg, 2001; Camic, 2003). For each question, categories are developed by the researcher based on the similar responses provided by the participants. Once the categories have been well established, the researcher then calculates the percentages of responses provided for in each category.

Subsequently, as is recommended by the literature (Munton et al, 1999; Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003), 20% of the questionnaires are cross checked by an impartial “coder” (« contre codage ») in order to verify that the contents of the responses provided by the teachers on the various questions were placed in similar categories. The inter-coding agreement obtained is close to 95%, which constitutes a high accordance level⁵.

Nonparametric statistics such as chi-square were further used to verify the presence of inter or intra-group differences in regards to different variables. The analysis highlighted significant differences in teacher evaluation practices and perceptions based on the identification of certain variables. A number of questions were analyzed based on the variables in question. A statistician, employed by the department of psychology at the Université de Québec à Montréal, was consulted on a regular basis during the planning stages of the data analysis, as well during the actual data analysis and the statistical interpretations of the results⁶.

3.2 Demographics

A sample of 65 elementary cycle 1 and 2, English/French (languages) and math teachers affiliated with the Lester B. Pearson School Board and the Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal took part in the study (Table 3.1). In total, the teachers are affiliated with eleven different schools. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of teachers partaking in the study teach in one of the Jewish schools. Two of the Jewish schools provide primary instruction in French; these schools, however, have a large

⁵ I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Anik Demers, a doctoral Psychology student at the Université du Québec à Montréal, for her collaboration in coding the responses from several questionnaires and for her assistance in the « contre codage » process.

⁶ I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Jean Bégin, research statistician in the department of Psychology (UQAM), for his guidance and expertise in helping to analyze and interpret the data.

bilingual teaching staff and participated in English throughout the research study. The other portion of respondents (43%) teaches in different English schools that are part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Table 3.1
Distribution of schools that participated in the study

<u>Schools</u>	<u>No. of teachers (N=65)</u>
Jewish Peoples School and Peretz School (CSL campus)	6
Jewish Peoples School and Peretz School (Snowdon campus)	3
Maimonides (CSL campus)	6
Maimonides (VSL campus)	7
Akiva	7
United Talmud Torah (VSL campus)	5
Westpark (LBPSB)	8
Hurbert Purcell (LBPSB)	7
Beechwood (LBPSB)	7
Seignoury (LBPSB)	6
Springgarden (LBPSB)	3

In the present study, eighty-eight percent (88%) of the respondents are female, while close to three-quarters of the teachers responding to the questionnaire are between the ages of 25 to 46 years old (41 % are between the age of 25 to 35, while 33% are between the age of 36 to 46 years old)⁷. A larger proportion of the respondents teach English or math in either cycle 1 or cycle 2 (62 %), as opposed to teaching French in either of the two cycles (Figure 3.1).

⁷ This data is similar to the statistics provided by the MEQ (2001) between the academic years of 1995-1996 and 1999-2000 in that approximately 83.4 % of Quebec elementary school teachers were female. However, according to data from the MEQ for the same time periods, the average age of elementary teachers was around 46 years old.

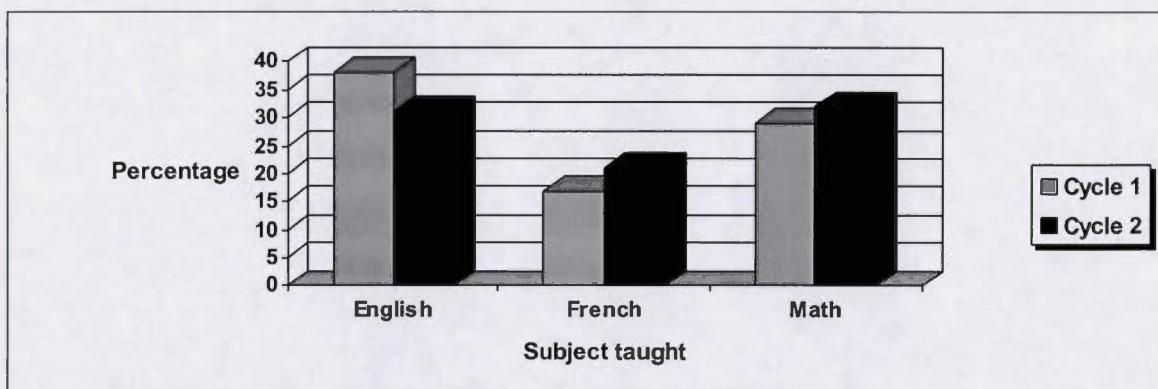


Figure 3.1 Subject(s) taught by respondents.

Eighty-six percent (86%) of the respondents teach in typical classrooms with varying amounts of students, while the remaining are either resource or special education teachers. There is a large variation in the number of years the respondents had been teaching, ranging between one and thirty years (an average of 9 years). In addition, the number of years employed in their present school also varied considerably. The range is again between one and thirty-five years, with the average being five years. Lastly, 86% of respondents obtained a bachelor degree in university, while the other ones (14%) either obtained a college/ special training degree or a master's degree in university.

It is important to specify that the objective of this study was not necessarily to obtain a subject distribution that was entirely representative. Rather, the aimed goal was to obtain a subject pool that closely approximated the demographic breakdown of teachers in Quebec, while at the same time encapsulating a diverse cross-section of participants in regards to gender, age, years of teaching experience, grades and teaching environment.

3.3 Teacher assessment practices

The first objective of the research study is to document the student assessment practices most commonly used by cycle 1 and cycle 2 teachers in their regular evaluation of two main subjects: language arts (French or English), and math. Seven questions in the questionnaire (questions 1 through 7) provide us with information on the actual evaluation practices of the respondents.

Type of assessment used

Respondents were asked, depending on their subject, to indicate which types of assessments they use with their students. As anticipated, the actual evaluation practices of teachers vary somewhat depending on the subject matter taught. Figure 3.2 presents the type of evaluations favoured by math teachers: short answer tests (37% very often; 46% often); multiple choice tests (25% very often; 44% often); and portfolios (3 % very often; 65% often). These three types of evaluations are also occasionally (i.e. sometimes) used by more than 10% of teachers.

The type of evaluations favoured by language teachers is somewhat different: written projects (23% very often; 56% often); portfolios (15% - very often; 69% often); oral presentations (11 % very often; 39% often); and fill-in-the blanks (14% very often; 39% often). Moreover, these four types of evaluations are also occasionally used by more than 10% of teachers. Lastly, 55% of language teachers use authentic (“real-life”) tasks sometimes in their evaluation practices.

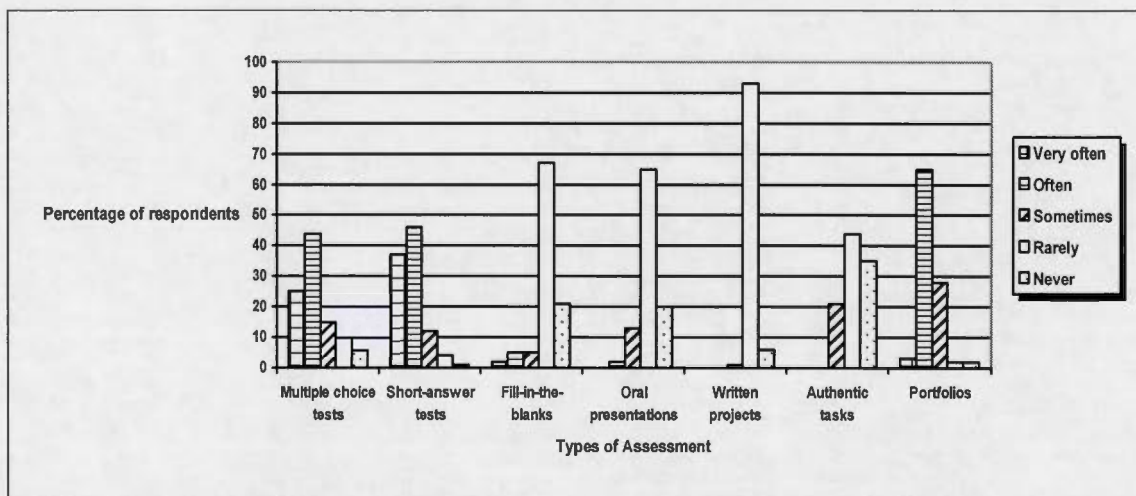
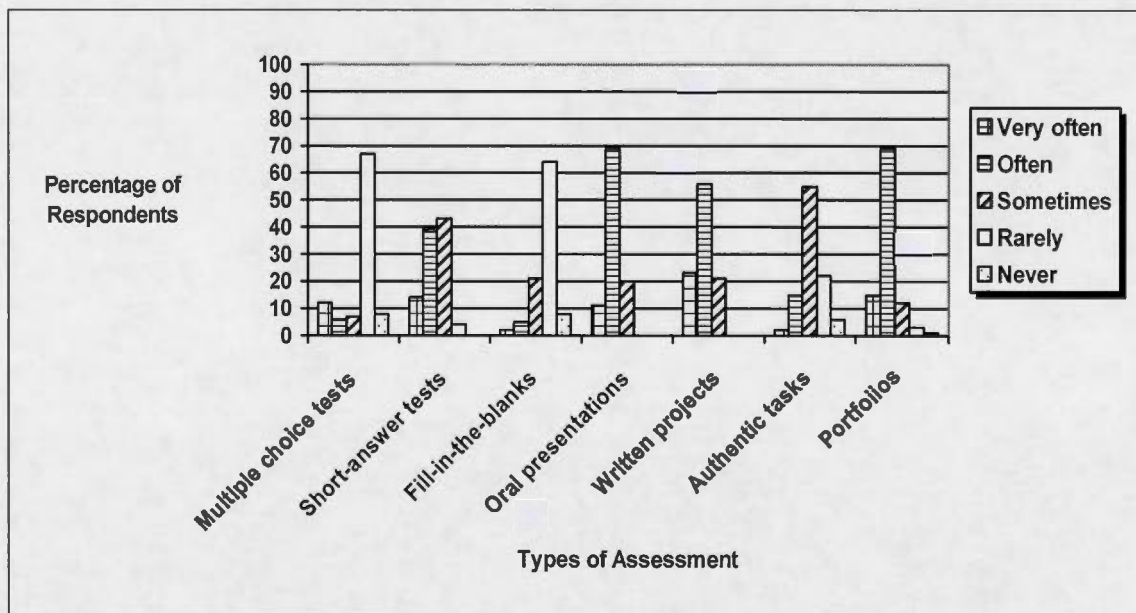
Math teachers*Language teachers*

Figure 3.2 Assessment methods used by math teachers and by language teachers.

Type of assessment associated with the subject taught

The type of assessments teachers opt to use appears to be related to the subjects they teach. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the teachers indicate that they use specific assessment methods depending on the subject being taught. A large proportion of language teachers ask their student to work on projects and presentations (either individual or in group) (83%), while a smaller percentage of math teachers (25%) use this approach with their students. Math teachers tend to employ a more “traditional” assessment approach, by which a majority of math teachers indicate that they use standard paper and pencil type assessment methods.

Frequency of assessment

The teachers were asked how often during the school year the general academic progress of students is evaluated. A large portion (81%) responded that they evaluate their students on a weekly basis, which includes a range of once-a-week to 2-3 times per week. Daily evaluation is used by 15% and monthly by 4% of the respondents.

Purpose of the evaluations

Ninety-four percent (94%) of the teachers respond that they evaluate students for the use of reporting purposes. Furthermore, 76% of respondents indicate that they evaluate students in order to help them with their lesson plan (i.e. subsequent teaching planning). Fifty-two percent (52%) of teachers use different evaluation methods to evaluate a certain skill or competency. Only 7% use various evaluation methods for class placement.

In fact, the respondents provided numerous reasons for evaluating the students in their classroom. As figure 3.3 indicates a number of justifications were offered. They are presented here in order of frequencies (from more frequent to less frequent): to measure the skill levels (e.g. their strengths and weaknesses; and measure their acquired competencies), measure the progress (including: assess whether they are able to succeed academically), evaluate the work habits (including: how they work independently and in a group), or assess student potential. A smaller proportion of teachers mention that evaluations help them to assess student motivation as well as to assess for a learning disability.

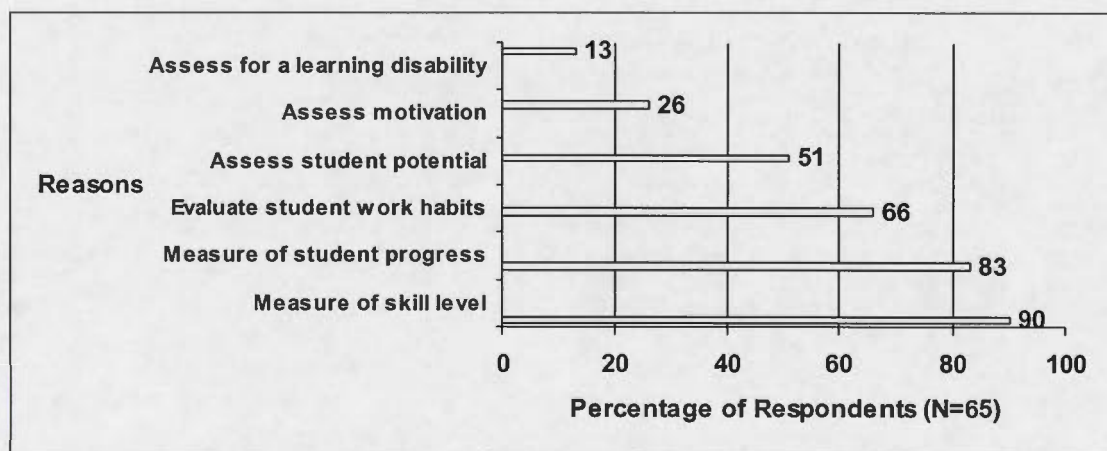


Figure 3.3 Primary reasons for evaluating students in school.

A chi-square test comparing actual⁸ versus ideal reasons for evaluating students in school indicates that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the variables ([chi square]=.41, df=1, P=.517). Common answers for both actual and ideal reasons for evaluating students include: to evaluate their strengths, to

⁸ Please refer to the Teacher Assessment Practices And Perceptions Questionnaire (Appendix B), question #8. The question 8 is formulated as follow: What do you feel are the primary reasons for evaluating students in school? What do you feel should be the primary reasons for evaluating students?

measure acquired competencies, to measure student skill level, evaluate student weaknesses, and evaluate acquired student competencies.

Accommodations based on student diversity

A large majority of teachers indicate that they adapt their methods of student evaluation as a result of the diversity of students in their class. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the teachers indicate that they use one or more types of accommodations to assist students during testing or the assessment process. For example, figure 3.4 allows us to see that 85% of respondents indicate that they grant *extended time* to their students to complete tests, projects, or assignments.

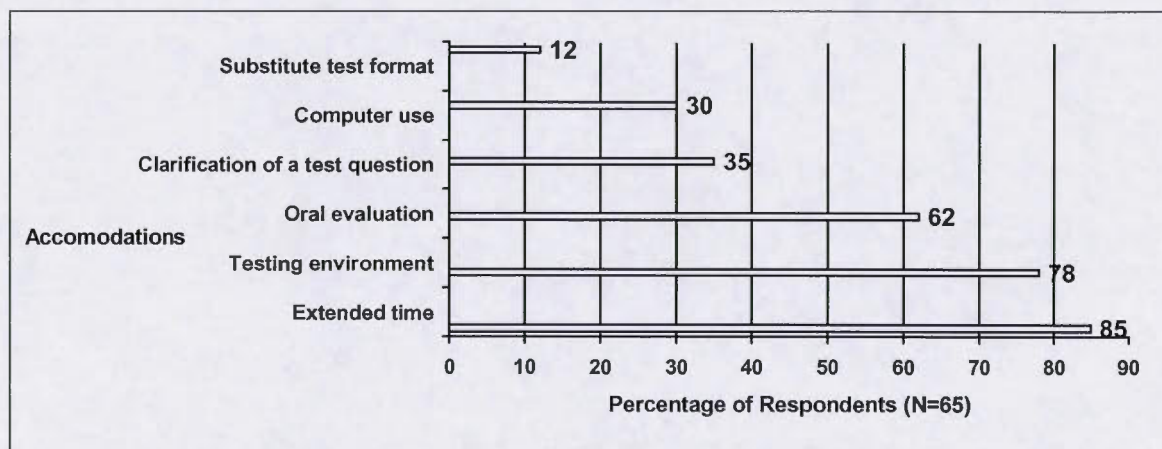


Figure 3.4 Accommodations made during the evaluation process.

Respondents mention that providing extra time is especially helpful to students with learning disabilities who have slow processing abilities, to students who must use some form of adaptive equipment, to students who are severely hard of hearing and whose language is limited, to students who must use a reader and/or scribe, and to other students with reading or writing problems. A large proportion of teachers (78%) indicate that they change the *testing environment* to help better accommodate certain students. For example, teachers mention that some students

with disabilities who have difficulty concentrating or have severe test anxiety benefit from writing their tests in a quieter, less distracting environment. Also, a couple of respondents note that for some students with chronic illnesses, the time of day a test is given is important (e.g., energy levels may be reduced at certain times during the day, or a student may have a pre-determined medication or treatment schedule). In such cases, respondents mention that they will attempt to accommodate their student's needs. In addition, 60% of teachers mention that they use *oral evaluation* as an accommodation for evaluation procedures. Teachers remark that oral evaluation is often necessary for students with severe problems in written expression, particularly if the expected written responses are extensive. Other teachers note that oral evaluation tends to be a viable option for students with severe reading disabilities. Some teacher (35%) report that they offer students *clarification of a test question* as a form of accommodation. For example, respondents mention that some students with learning disabilities need assistance with directions and/or the vocabulary on tests and exams. A group of respondents (30%) indicate that they have encouraged or allowed students in their class to use a *computer* (i.e. with word processing software) while writing a test or producing some form of work. Lastly, a small minority of teachers' (12%) mention that they provide, or have provided in the past, *substitute test formats*. Providing tests in an appropriate format can promote independence for the student. For example, teachers indicate that they have provided tests on paper of a specific color, used colored overlays, or written in large print.

Recent modification of evaluation practices

The teachers were also asked whether or not they had modified their general evaluation practices in the last two years, and if so, what inspired this change. Sixty percent (60 %) of respondents indicate that they had made modifications. There were a variety of reasons which influenced this change (Figure 3.5), most frequently being

a shift in the school's evaluation procedures (as a result of the curriculum reforms) (67%).

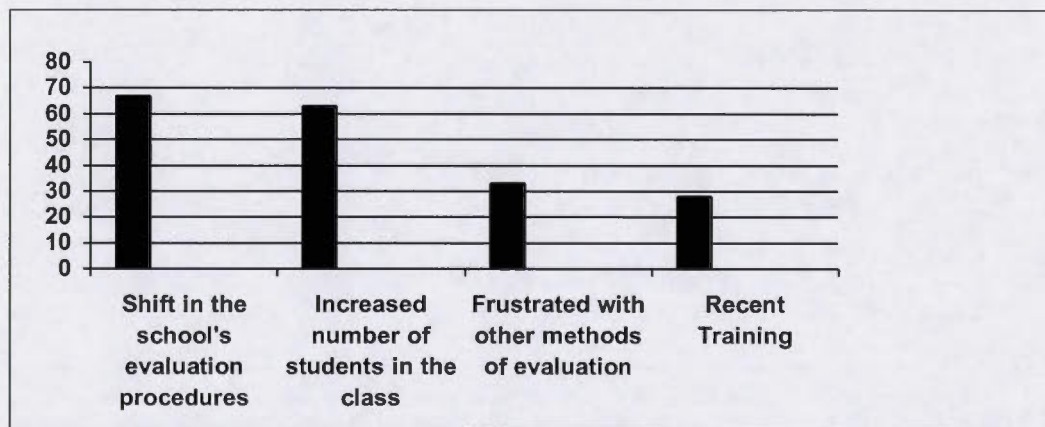


Figure 3.5 Primary factors that inspired recent changes or modifications of the evaluation practices (n=39).

Other reasons that were cited for the changes in the evaluation practices over the past two years included: an increased number of students in their class which necessitated a change in evaluation practices (63%). In addition, approximately 1 out of 3 teachers that had modified their evaluation practices indicated that they had done so, in part, because they were frustrated with the methods of evaluation they were using (“I moved away from tests because my students were not really learning”). A certain number of respondents (28%) mentioned they modified or changed their classroom evaluation practices as a result of a recent training they had obtained. Other reasons that were reported to have inspired a change in the evaluation practices of teachers included: success with other forms of evaluation (18%); discussions with colleagues (14%) and this includes gaining ideas from younger teachers; observations of students having difficulties with past evaluations (12%); parents that didn’t feel comfortable with the evaluation used (10%); and reading new methods in teaching journals (7%).

Student involvement in the evaluation process

Eighty-two percent (82%) of the teachers indicate that they try to involve their students in the assessment process. Of the remaining respondents, another twelve percent (12%) mention that they sometimes involve their student in the evaluation process. Only six percent (6%) mentioned not involving their students in the evaluation process. Figure 3.6 presents the form and frequency of student involvement in the assessment process as reported and specified by the participants.

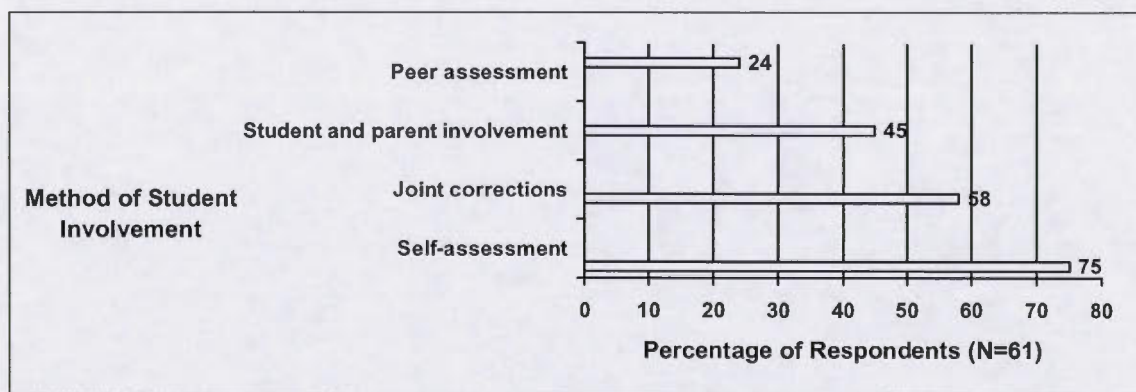


Figure 3.6 Student involvement in the assessment process.

Seventy five percent (75%) of respondents indicate they encourage their students to self-assess their work and progress. Respondents remark that self-assessment tends to fall into one of two groups. First, based on the responses of teachers, there are self-assessments that evaluate the students' attitudes or feelings about a specific unit of study. In these assessments, students are asked to reflect upon their own work habits and group skills. Other self-assessments attempt to provide evidence about how students judge their own understanding of specific concepts. More than half of the respondents (58%) mention using 'joint correction' methods. A joint correction is a process by which together the teacher and the student correct and review the student's homework, assignments, and/or tests. Another 45% of

respondents indicate that they use assessment practices that require parental involvement (e.g. could include students in the parent-teacher interview; and quarterly portfolio review with parental involvement). Finally, nearly a quarter of the teachers use peer-assessment where students assess the work of their classmates.

Knowledge of the Q.E.P. and the student evaluation policies

When asked if they had been informed about the Quebec Education Program (Q.E.P.) (i.e. curriculum and evaluation proposals) eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents indicate they had, while only seven percent (7%) indicate that they had not (Figure 3.7). A small minority (3%) mention that they had been informed with regards to only certain areas (e.g. the curriculum, but not the proposed evaluation procedures). When asked whether they had material explaining the new evaluation proposals brought forth by the Q.E.P., 54% said they did, while 37% said they did not. Nine percent (9%) indicate that they did not know or could not recall whether they had any information explaining the new evaluation proposals.

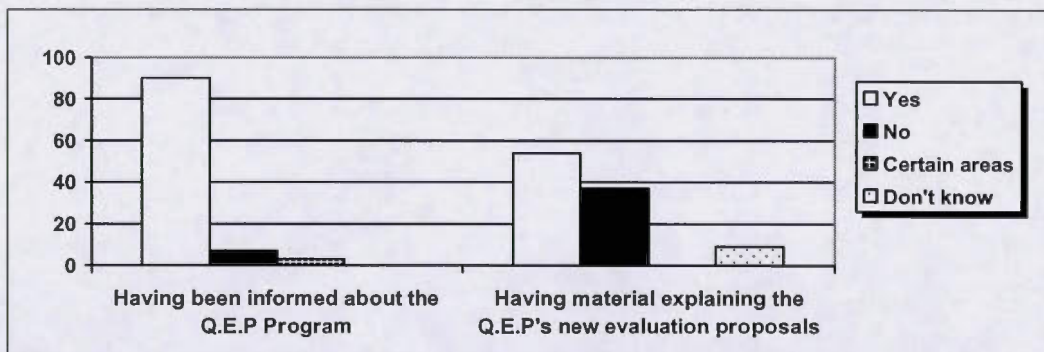


Figure 3.7 Information and material about the Quebec Education Program.

3.4 Teacher assessment perceptions

The second specific objective of the study is to explore the student assessment perceptions held by cycle 1 and cycle 2 teachers. Five questions in the questionnaire (Questions 8 through 12) were associated directly or indirectly with this objective.

Advantages of the assessment practices most often used

As Table 3.2 presents, respondents indicate overwhelmingly that the assessment practices that they are using in the classrooms with their students are providing useful (87%) and a lot of information (81%). Seventy-seven percent (77%) of teachers also state that a real attribute of the assessment material used is that it is easy to explain to parents and that generally parents seem to approve of the assessments being used. Another advantage that is reported by over 3/4 of the participants is that students seem to enjoy the evaluation process used (77%). In addition, nearly as many respondents (70%) report as an advantage the fact that it seems easy for their students to understand the feedback being provided. Nearly two thirds of teachers (65%) state that they find their assessment practices easy to administer and a quick way of assessing (e.g. reuse the same material every year).

Table 3.2

Main advantages of the assessment practices most often used in the classroom

	<u>% of Respondents (N=65)</u>
Provides useful information	87
Provides a lot of information	81
Easy to explain to parents	77
Students enjoy the process	77
Easy for students to understand feedback	70
Quick way of assessing	65

Disadvantages of the assessment practices most often used

Teachers were subsequently asked whether they perceived disadvantages or drawbacks to the assessment practices that they use most often in the classroom. Fifty five percent (55%, n=36) said they did not perceive any disadvantages, while 45% (n = 29) said they did perceive certain disadvantages to the assessment methods they are using. Among the respondents that note some disadvantages nearly all (93%) mention that they are time consuming to administer and especially cumbersome to correct (Table 3.3). Other reported disadvantages included the fact they have been using the same evaluation tools or activities for many years (43%), or that their students seem bored or uninterested in the evaluation practices being employed (25%). Some teachers mention that the evaluations being used do not provide students with an opportunity to contribute to the evaluation process (23%) (i.e. student involvement in the assessment process is limited by nature of the more restrictive, outcome-oriented, paper-and-pencil evaluation methods that are being employed). Other disadvantages cited by a minority of respondents are the difficulty in administering the evaluations, the lack of opportunity for parents to participate in the evaluation process and the limited information obtained through the evaluation regarding student competencies and skill levels.

Table 3.3

Main disadvantages of the assessment practices most often used in the classroom

	% of Respondents (N=29)
Time consuming	93
Using methods for many years	43
Boring / uninteresting	25
Does not give students a chance to contribute to evaluation	23
Difficult to administer	16
Does not give parents a chance to contribute to evaluation	10
Limited information provided	10

Satisfaction with assessment methods

When asked to remember which type of assessment brought the most satisfaction in terms of benefit to their students, numerous types of assessments are mentioned. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents indicate individual student presentations (whether oral or written). A relatively high percentage (82%) mentions that group assignments /projects (i.e. students working in collaboration with each other to complete a task or project) brought the most satisfaction (Figure 8). The use of portfolios in the classroom is also a popular choice (65%). Forty four percent (44%) of teachers note that they derive satisfaction from administering ‘real world’ or authentic type of assessments. Multiply choice tests were found to have brought the most satisfaction to only a hand full of respondents (4%).

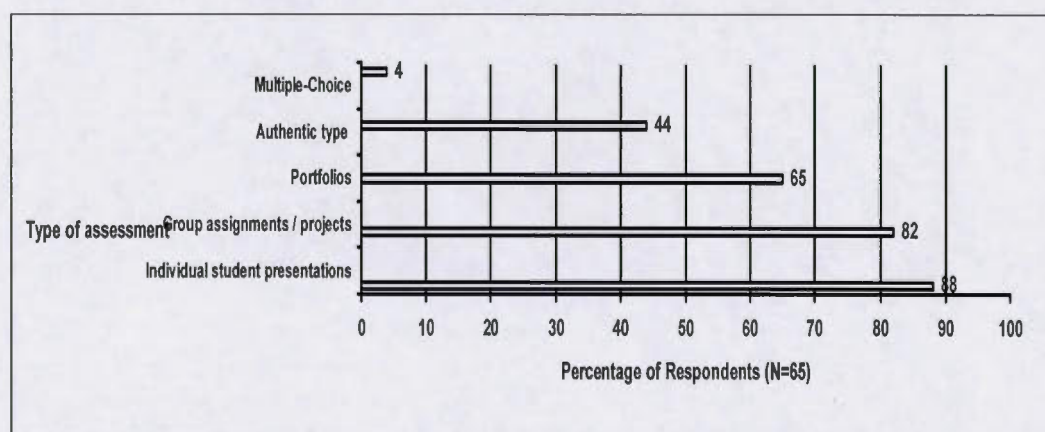


Figure 3.8 Types of assessment that illicit the most satisfaction in terms of benefit to their students.

3.5 Alternative assessment

The third objective of this study is to assess the knowledge, perceptions, and willingness of cycle 1 and cycle 2 teachers in the use of various forms of alternative assessments in different learning situations. Nine questions in the questionnaire (questions 13 through 21) concern this objective.

Traditional versus alternative assessment

Firstly, the teachers were asked to define in their own words the meaning first of traditional assessment and then of alternative assessment. Approximately three out of every four respondents, indicate that traditional assessments are typical paper and pencil type tests (for example: “Multiple choice tests, short answer tests...”). A little over sixty percent of respondents also indicate that traditional tests are used to obtain class averages and are result oriented (for example: “Paper tests to see what a child knows...looks only at results...need to find the correct answer to the question...focuses on the results that need to be correct in order to determine their knowledge”). Lastly, just over forty percent (40%) of teachers mentioned that traditional assessments are short answer type tests and/or used to obtain class rankings (for example: “measures whether the student has grasped the lesson; specific, grade oriented, correct responses”).

More than three out of every four teachers indicate that alternative assessments involve hands-on type of work. Over fifty percent of respondents note that alternative assessments draw on student creativity, involve the students in the assessment process, do not compare students to one another, and are collaborative in nature (for example: “it cares about process... ongoing, everyday... looks for progress; general knowledge about a subject... assessing student competencies...assesses the general knowledge in a non-specific manner... it’s about the progress, the knowledge, and the process...more global type of assessment looking at many different aspects... opposite of the pass/fail model”). Approximately thirty percent (30%) of teachers indicate that alternative assessments require students to produce some type of work, are “real-world” type of assessments, and allow students to learn during the assessment process (for example: “It’s an authentic assessment...it’s a performance based assessment method...it’s more hands on”).

In favor of using alternative assessments

When respondents were asked if they were in favor of the use of alternative assessments in the classroom, nearly three-quarters (74%) of the teachers declare themselves in favor. Statements to this affect that were made during the interview included: “it is an extremely pleasant and enriching experience for the student”; “encourage students to reach ultimate potential”; “it acknowledges the individual learning styles of students”; “I prefer alternative assessments because it gives a better view of each individual child’s abilities”; “it encourages student decision-making and problem solving as well as being sensitive to learning styles”. Teachers that were somewhat critical of the use of alternative assessment (approximately 20%) mention that: “alternative assessments are not easy to adapt when you have a large group of students in your class”, “alternative assessments are time consuming”; “.... are not standardized”, “... are difficult to grade and are not consistent in their grading scheme”.

Materials and willingness to use alternative assessments

Respondents were asked if they had the necessary materials would they use alternative assessment methods. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents suggest they would, eighteen percent (18%) indicate that they would not; while four percent (4%) say they are not sure. Of the teachers who responded affirmatively to the prospect of using alternative assessment with their students (n=51), four preferred methods are mentioned (Figure 3.9). The most popular retained by more than half of the respondents (52%) is group projects. Authentic type assessment (‘real life task or problem’) and portfolios are close behind at forty-one (41%) and forty-two percent (42%) respectively. Oral presentations are chosen by twenty-one percent (21%) of the teachers.

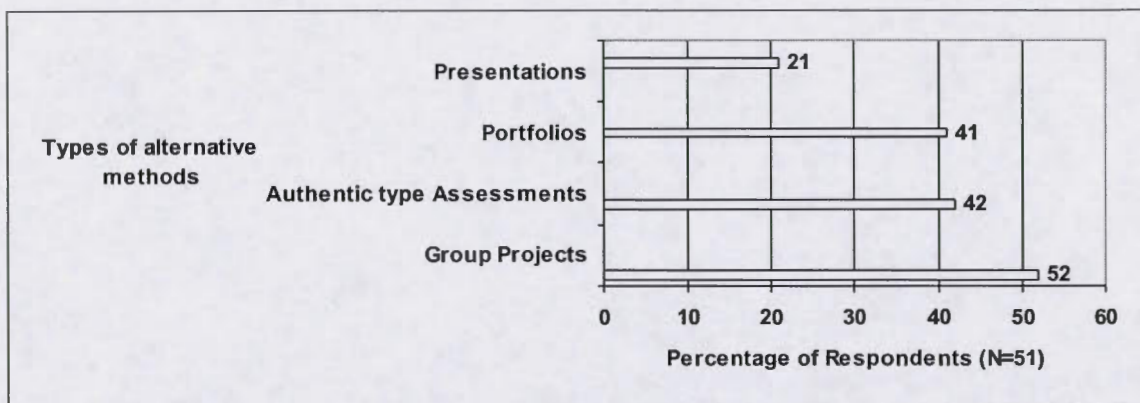


Figure 3.9 Types of alternative assessment methods preferred.

Three quarters of our participants respond affirmatively when questioned as to whether they anticipate using alternative assessment methods in the future. As Figure 3.10 displays, there seems to be a number of factors, as purported by respondents, related to the use of alternative methods in the classroom. The most common ones are whether teachers anticipate having enough time to use alternative assessment methods (87%) and if the resources necessary to implement and carry out effective alternative assessment are easily accessible and available in their school (76%) (e.g. purchasing of new materials, distribution of existing school material; etc.). Another important factor that teachers mention as a precursor to using alternative assessments is the general skill level and attitude of students in their classes (35 %) (for example, are the students generally cooperative? do they exhibit the skill level to partake in various alternative assessment tasks? etc.). In addition, twenty-four percent (24%) of the teachers state that additional training may increase their use of alternative assessments, while acceptance by the administration (21%) or parents (16%) are also considered factors in their use of alternative assessments.

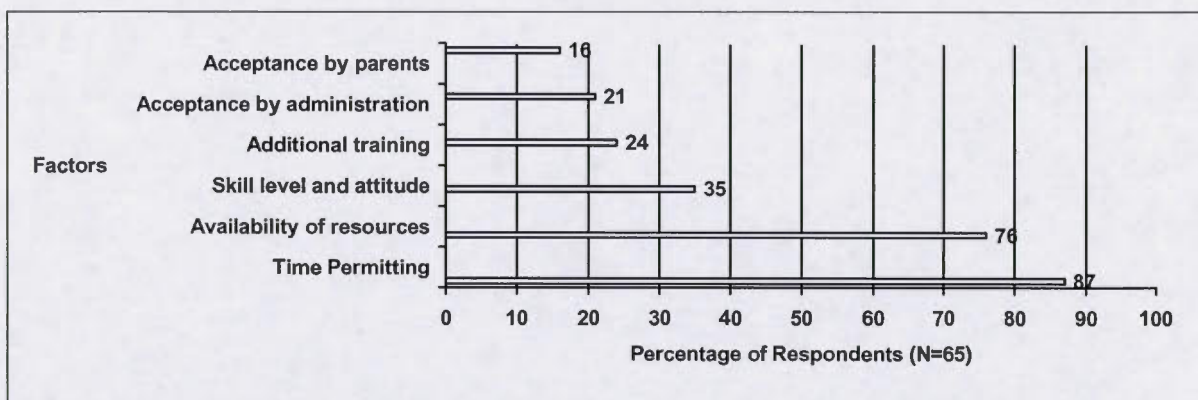


Figure 3.10 Factors influencing the use of alternative assessment methods.

Alternative assessment training

Respondents were asked to describe the amount of alternative assessment training they had received over the course of the past two years with respect to different types of training opportunities. Generally, two categories of training were identified: in-school and out-of-school training. In-school training includes all professional development opportunities that occur within the confines of the school in which the respondents work. Examples of in-school training include: lectures, meetings, practical experience or internships; correspondence course using the computer labs in school; in-school workshop series, and free period to do independent reading. Out-of-school training include, for his part, all professional development opportunities that occur outside of the school environment (may occur during school hours or in the evening/weekends). Examples of out-of-school training opportunities include: workshops, conferences, seminars, lecture series, courses, and “professional” day to read and study. Overall, respondents indicate that they had not received a great deal of training, with only 10% of teachers indicating that they participated in out-of-school training opportunities “a great deal” of time over the past two years (Figure 3.11). However, 85% of respondents did indicate that they attended out-of-school training (predominantly conferences and seminars) that discussed or alluded to alternative assessment “a little bit” over the past two years. Finally, a large

proportion of respondents (73%) report that they had not received any in-school training with respect to student assessment and specifically that of alternative assessment.

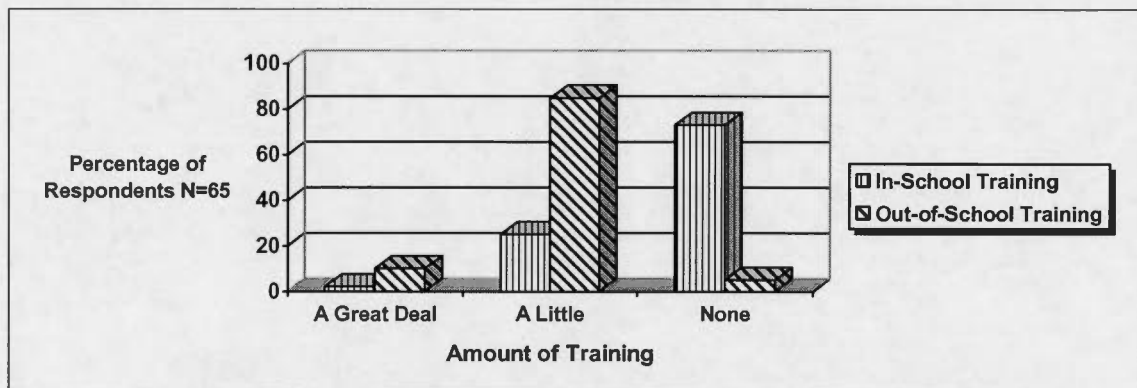


Figure 3.11 The amount of alternative training received over the past two years.

Training preferences

Lastly, teachers were asked to rank the type of training they thought would be best in order to familiarize them with the use of alternative assessments; the ranking possibilities were the followings: most beneficial, beneficial, or least beneficial. Seventy six percent (76%) of the respondents think that workshops (in school and outside of school) are most beneficial. No other type of training was given this preference since only 12% find conferences and seminars to be most beneficial. A much smaller percentage (5%) finds specific courses on the subject or staff meetings discussing the topic (also 5%) to be most beneficial. The training type deemed least beneficial is independent reading (which includes the development of manuals/textbooks) at 66%. Lastly, practical experiences/internships, which include mentorships, were judged to be least beneficial by 24% of the respondents.

3.5.1 Alternative assessment and correlations with different relevant variables

Given that the perception and the use of alternative assessment was an important aspect of the study and considering its links with the current education reform efforts in Quebec, correlations were performed to identify significant relationships between various alternative assessment components (e.g. respondent knowledge, perceptions, and use of alternative assessments) and some demographic variables (e.g. respondents' gender, age, years of teaching experience, grades taught, and school in which they teach). Numerous correlations were run, but only a few were found to be significant.

Data analysis reveals a correlation between the *subjects taught and the use of alternative assessments*. A chi-square test comparing the subject that a teacher instructs and the use of alternative assessments in their classroom (alternative assessment methods being defined as: presentations, projects, authentic tasks, and portfolios) found a statistically significant relationship between the variables ([chi square] = 6.21. df=1, P=.010). Specifically, teachers that taught languages (i.e. English and French) were more inclined to use alternative type assessments with their students, as opposed to teachers who taught math who were more inclined to use more traditional types of assessments.

Furthermore, there was also a *division between respondents teaching in cycle 1 and those teaching in cycle 2*. A chi-square test comparing the use of alternative assessments between cycle 1 and cycle 2 teachers indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the use of alternative assessments and the particular cycle ([chi square]= 4.76. df=1, P=.010). Specifically, a greater number of cycle 2 teachers are employing the use of alternative assessments in their classrooms as opposed to their contemporaries who are teaching younger students (i.e. cycle 1).

There was also a significant correlation between *years of teaching experience and openness to alternative assessments*. A chi-square test comparing the number of years of experience teaching compared with the perceptions of teachers in regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of alternative assessments and their willingness to use alternative assessments indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables ([chi square]= 6.88. df=1, P=.010). Those teachers who have more experience tend to have set patterns of evaluation, whereas the less experienced teachers are more open to new methods.

Similarly, those *teachers with more education* (e.g. university level) seem to be open to the possibilities of newer methods, whereas those teachers with less education (e.g. college level) are inclined toward the more traditional techniques. A test of difference comparing the level of formal education of teachers with the perceptions of teachers in regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of alternative assessments and their willingness to use alternative assessments with their students indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables ([chi square]= 5.86. df=1, P=.010).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this section elements of our discussion are presented. Three points will be elaborated upon: a recap of the background and the research objectives; a discussion of the main results of the study; and a review of the research limitations and the recommendations for future research. In addition, the contribution made to research and to our overall understanding of student assessment by this study will be outlined.

4.1 Review: background and research objective

The issue of student evaluation is one of the great ongoing debates between researchers in education. Numerous specialists highlight the urgent need to develop different and varied forms of evaluations to assess students. On one hand, it has been apparent for nearly the past fifteen years that in order to obtain a fair and a rather complete portrait of student learning, changes to traditional evaluation tools used to assess students needs to occur. The alternative assessment movement, were such advocates as Wiggins and Gardner, has clearly demonstrated the need and the potential benefit of expanding the dimensions by which student competencies are evaluated. In addition, experts in the field of formative evaluation have continuously defended the need to vary the methods of student evaluation both in order to assist teachers in their future interventions as well as to increase the range of student competencies and their work habits (Conrod, 1999; Sparkes, Sturge, Dupuis, Fyfe, Taylor & Sullivan, 1999; Villeneuve & Laliberté, 2002). Thus, student evaluations focused solely on declarative or subject specific knowledge is judged to be insufficient. Evaluations must also focus on the student attitudes, emerging skills and

knowledge, competencies, performances, and the work habits of students. The methods proposed by experts in the field of alternative and formative assessment are quite different from those methods that are typically used and associated with traditional evaluation. Namely, they attempt to evaluate certain student dimensions and competencies often ignored by traditional evaluative tools.

The need for increased diversity with respects to student evaluative practices by teachers is especially important considering that the recent education reforms in numerous countries have required or recommended major overhauls not solely with respects to curriculum and pedagogical approaches, but also with respects to the type of evaluations used in order to measure student progress. These propositions which are centered around such notions as student competencies, higher-order thinking and problem solving abilities, require that appropriate evaluation tools be developed in order to be able to gage student progress in these specific areas. The need to revisit the topic of student evaluations and to increase the various modes of evaluation has been well documented in the literature. While considerable work is still required to enrich the bank of available instruments (e.g. that they be adapted for use with different age groups or different competency areas), nevertheless a series of alternative tools have already been proposed and occasionally used in the classroom (MEQ, 2000; Jalbert, & Munn, 2001).

The need for change has been clearly established. However, in practice this are not entirely come to fruition (e.g. changes to the evaluative practices in the classroom). Firstly, numerous authors consulted highlight the inherent difficulties implementing changes to a system as complex as educational institutions (Hall & Hord, 1987; Fullan & Stiegelbouer, 1991). Furthermore, various authors caution the efficacy of introducing “partial” changes (i.e. reforms) to the educational system (e.g. changing the curriculum taught and the academic approaches without modifying

student evaluative practices and tools) (Resnick et Resnick, 1992). Often pedagogic journals (e.g. *Vie Pédagogique*, *Educational Leadership*, *Aster*, etc) will describe new teaching initiatives in a specific subject (content area) or an approach to take when instructing, but rarely do they discuss new evaluation tools associated with these new projects. A bank of alternative assessment methods is already available (CRESST, 1993; Wiggins, 1993, 1997) and could be used directly (or pending some minor adjustments) by teachers. However, several factors limit its use widescale use by teachers (a general resistance, lack of information and training by teachers, lack of clear directives from the school administration, restrictive amount of choice and the need to develop a broad range of instruments, etc).

The objective of our thesis centres on the type of students evaluations used by teachers that have been recently implicated in the Quebec education reform. Our objectives are rather humble, but aim to obtain information specific to our research question. Specifically, we choose to focus our attention on the perceptions and evaluative practices of language arts and mathematics elementary school teachers. What are their perceptions and evaluative practices with respects to both traditional and alternative evaluations? A questionnaire was constructed and teachers in different elementary schools from the region of Montreal (i.e. Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 Language arts and mathematics teachers) were solicited to partake in the study.

4.2 Reflections on the findings of the study

Evaluative practices

The results of this study illustrate that, three years into the education reforms in Quebec, the elementary school teachers interviewed report using varied evaluation methods when assessing their students and that these varied methods range along a

continuum between traditional evaluations and alternative evaluation. In fact, numerous teachers remarked using both traditional testing methods (tools created to ascertain the number of correct responses by a student) and alternative techniques (based on the evaluation of student processes, skills, and competencies). It appears as if the collaborative efforts made by proponents of alternative assessment (Wiggins, 1997; Gardner, 1992B; Resnick et Resnick, 1992) and formative assessment (Conrod, 1999; Sparkes, Sturge, Dupuis, Fyfe, Taylor & Sullivan, 1999; Villeneuve & Laliberté, 2002) have, with the advent of the new reforms, bared dividend.

Dissatisfaction with the limitations of traditional testing techniques and continued faith in the value of multifaceted assessment has given rise to proposals for new assessment alternatives at all levels of education, including within the current education reforms. The underlying ideas of all these proposals share some common threads: these assessments ask students to perform, create, produce or do something that requires them to use higher-level, problem-solving skills; the assessment tasks themselves represent meaningful instructional activities; the tasks themselves are also relevant to real-life tasks or represent those that are common to a particular discipline. In addition, the shortcomings of traditional testing practices appear to have heightened interest in alternative assessment methods. A large majority of the teachers in this study were in favour of alternative assessment methods, as a result of having used them with success in the past or because they envisioned that their students would benefit from them. While most of the teachers anticipated or desired to use these alternative assessments, their use depended very much on the external factors such as training, time and administrative support.

Moreover, based on the results of this study, teachers instructing language arts to elementary school aged students, utilize a greater variety of evaluation methods, including those considered to be alternative in nature, than do their counterparts who

teach mathematics. All be it, even before the start of the reform, teachers were already using oral presentations, group projects, and authentic (real-world) activities, as ways to evaluate their students (Scallon, 1996). However, the impression was that these were exemplary practices not necessarily reflective of the evaluation practices of a majority of teachers. Our research indicates that, in the past several years, a large number of teachers have modified their evaluative practices. Several reasons were provided by the teachers in our study that help to explain this shift in student evaluative practices. Namely, directives or policies brought forth either by a specific school or the school board; a certain boredom or frustration with continued use of traditional testing methods; and lastly, an awareness (usually through training opportunities) of the benefits of diversifying and using other methods of evaluation.

Our research also demonstrated that this shift towards the use of novel evaluation methods is ongoing not only in schools that are considered progressive, but as well as more “traditional”, mainstream, schools. Thus, change in the way students are being evaluated seems to have taken root (albeit not necessarily quickly or not on a large scale, but entrenched nevertheless). The growing use of portfolios in the classroom (in our data as well as in the literature) is but one example of the start of noteworthy changes to student evaluative practices. Notwithstanding, there may be strong differences in the way teachers use portfolios and in the way it is used from one school to another. Increased interest in portfolio use signals a certain recognition of the importance of using different methods (both traditional and alternative) when evaluating students. Our data show that the use of a new variety of evaluating tools is also based on an awareness of the importance of actively involving students in their own evaluation process.

Furthermore, the results of this study also revealed that teachers’ flexibility (i.e. ready to try out new ideas and different forms of assessment) seem to depend, in

part, on academic qualification. The teachers who had higher academic qualifications were more willing to try out new ideas than those who had low academic qualifications. This has implication on school boards and other institutions who organize in-service courses for teachers. Benefits from in-service courses may depend not only on the nature of the training but also the academic qualifications of the participating teachers.

Encouragingly, a large group of teachers indicated that they adapted their assessment practices as a result of the diversity of students in their class. These teachers specified that they often modified the evaluation requirements for children with “special needs” – those students that either have an individualized education plan or have been identified as having either a serious learning difficulty or an intellectual deficit. The study revealed that teachers are often using quite novel or innovative approaches when modifying the assessment criteria or format for these students (e.g. option of using the computer; group assessment; or individual assessments that can take into account specific characteristics of each learner).

Evaluative perceptions

Numerous participants in the study reported that with the advent of the education reforms currently underway in Quebec, the way they perceived student learning and as an extension student assessment had somewhat changed over the past several years. Many teachers expressed their excitement about the satisfaction in using different types of assessment methods to help gauge the progress their students were making in their class and to help identify the areas in which their students were experiencing difficulty.

Data analysis helped to map out patterns between perceptions of classroom assessment and the teachers' classroom assessment practices. The findings in this study are similar to previous findings in other studies in that teacher perception of classroom assessment directly affected their classroom assessment practices (Chester and Quilter, 1998). Teachers generally perceived that the assessment practices that they are actually using in their classrooms with their students are providing useful and plentiful amounts of information. Advantages and benefits of the assessment practices being employed included: it is easy to explain to parents and parents seem to approve of the assessments being used; students seem to enjoy the evaluation process; it is easy for students to understand the feedback being provided by their teachers; and they are easy to administer and a quick way of assessing student progress.

This study also explored teacher perceptions with regards to the disadvantages or drawbacks to the assessment practices that they use most often in the classroom. The main disadvantage of the assessment methods used, as indicated by the respondents, was that they are time consuming - mainly due to the time it takes to correct student work. Other disadvantages highlighted by the respondents included: the fact they have been using the same evaluation tools or activities for many years; that their students seem bored or uninterested in the evaluation practices being employed; that the evaluations being used do not provide students with a chance to contribute to the evaluation process; that they are difficult to administer; and that they do not give parents a chance to contribute to the evaluation. A hand-full of teachers indicated that the assessment practices that they use most often in the classroom provide limited information about the competencies and skill levels of the student. Certain disadvantages cited by the respondents align with the criticism brought forth by various authors that have studied the limitations of traditional evaluations (ex.: boring for the teacher and the students, lack of participation on the part of the parents; limited to one type of knowledge, etc.) (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Gardner, 1992;

Wiggins, 1993; Messick, 1994) as well as those who critique alternative assessment methods (ex.: time consuming, difficult to administer, etc) (Geocaris, & Ross, 1999).

Alternative assessment

An interesting phenomenon appeared to emerge from the data. That while some teachers may not have yet been highly familiar with the specific terminology associated with alternative assessments (e.g. performance based, authentic, and real-world), a large number of them were already employing diverse alternative assessment practices. Numerous teachers had already gone beyond traditional forms of assessment and had adopted new methods (such as portfolio, project based assessment, oral presentation, group assessment, etc) in order to assess the competency and progress of their students. Teachers also reported having created or adopted innovative assessment measures as they became aware of recent research findings, as they observed colleagues using some in their respective classrooms, or as they became conscious of the growing diversity in their classrooms. Naturally, a great number of teachers were not solely using these methods of assessment; the majority of teachers were incorporating them into a more multidimensional assessment approach whereby both traditional and alternative assessment methods were being used. It is our presumption that the notion of alternative assessment was as familiar term to a lot of teachers because they have become fairly familiar with this form of assessment as a result of the curriculum reforms and the new evaluation policies that very much align with more authentic assessments. Results of the study also indicate that the teachers that have a greater understanding of the differences between traditional and alternative assessments are more likely to anticipate using alternative assessments within their student assessment repertoire. These teachers are also more inclined to try different forms of alternative assessment than their

counterparts whom do not have as great an understanding and knowledge of the differences between traditional and alternative assessment.

Also, it is important to note that while numerous respondents report using or being interested in utilizing novel evaluation methods, a small percentage of teachers did not deem the “newer” methods or alternative assessment useful or did not anticipate their use, most were from Jewish schools. The reason for this trend could partly be the result of a more solidified or traditional curriculum. The methods of assessment have a more direct relation to the purposes and traditions of the schools themselves and are less open to methods suggested by the Ministry of Education, for example. The teaching practices of the Jewish schools also relate to the religious communities attached to the schools, which can vary from school to school. Furthermore, feedback from participants teaching in Jewish schools, suggests that these teachers, and by extension their schools, are offering their student population a more traditional schooling experience. Student learning was most often measured by testing specific questions which were tangible and structured and which could be administered within a certain limited time period.

There also appeared to be a division between the assessment methods used in Cycle 1 and those used in Cycle 2. It appears that alternative assessments were more prevalent in the older grades (i.e. grades 3 and 4). This could be due to the fact that alternative methods are more apt for the material taught and the cognitive stage of these students. Indeed, older students that have already acquired some of the basic skills in language and math may be more open to newer suggestions of assessment techniques than students in younger grades that are still learning the basic academic skills. Moreover, as Tardif (1991) mentions, older students are more sensitive to “learning for learning purposes” as opposed to “learning for testing purposes”.

Students in higher grades seem to appreciate to a greater degree activities and situations that are associated with a learning goal.

Another result observed is that teachers with more years of formal education (i.e. at the university level) seemed to be more open to the possibilities of using newer methods of assessment. Teachers with a limited (or smaller) number of years of education seemed more inclined toward the more traditional techniques. The connection to be made here may be that education augments the chances that teachers are informed of different aspects learning and the diverse methods possible of measuring student progress in the different intellectual and academic domains. Lastly, results of the study revealed that teachers who have more experience tend to have set patterns of evaluation, whereas the less experienced teachers are more open to try new methods. Teachers with less years of experience (either the younger teachers or those recently joining the profession) were more likely to perceive advantages and benefits of alternative assessment methods and were more likely to use them with their students. It seems clear that training provided in university in the past 5 to 10 years includes examples and practice with varied and divers evaluation methods.

4.3 Pertinence and impact of the results of the study

The education reform movement was implemented in Quebec in 2000 and changes to both the curriculum and evaluation procedures are scheduled to continue until the end of the decade. Inspired by research in the area of cognitive psychology, these reform efforts like other reforms recently proposed in other countries, attempts to place the child at the centre of the learning process and seeks to help them master basic skills (e.g. such as reading, writing, and arithmetic) and learn the content in core subject areas, as well as acquire general competencies such as the ability to work effectively either autonomously or in groups and general thinking and processing

skills (problem solving, critical analysis, self-evaluation, etc). It is also apparent, according to research, that measuring the acquisition, progress, and generalization of the competencies are not accomplished using similar evaluation tools. Numerous evaluation methods already proposed by the alternative assessment movement could respond well to the needs being brought forth as a result of the education reform. Nevertheless, it is also clear, that the creation of additional well conceived evaluative methods would serve to enrich the evaluation experience.

Much controversy and attention has been focused on changes with respects to student evaluation practices. Therefore, it is our belief, that it is vital to gain a better sense and perspective of the evaluation methods actually used by teachers, the advantages and disadvantages of these evaluation methods as reported by the teachers themselves, and their openness to and interest in using varied or novel evaluation instruments. Establishing such a portrait is a critical step in guiding the development of such instruments. This study, while humble in its interpretive scope, nevertheless is a step towards achieving such a goal. This study demonstrates that progressively the integration of alternative assessment methods into the general repertoire of evaluations tools used by teachers is taking hold, and that teachers have expressed an interest to embark, albeit at their rhythm, further along these lines.

4.4 Limitations and recommendation for further research

As is the case in most research studies, there are certain limitations inherent in the current study which makes it difficult to generate broad assumptions and conclusions. Firstly, there are a limited number of teachers who participated in the study. While the number of teachers who agreed to partake in the study offered a reasonable sample and allowed us to draw certain general assumptions, we must be careful not to draw sweeping conclusions based on responses of a small number of all

Québec teachers. Our recommendation for future research would be to increase the sample size and to recruit additional samples of teachers from various English school boards across Quebec.

Furthermore, this study chose to explore the evaluative practices and perception patterns of teachers from two school boards. However, both school boards are not demographically representative, both linguistically and religiously, of the overall Quebec population. Though it is surmised that the responses provided by the teachers in this study would be rather reflective of the teaching community in general in Quebec, this assumption cannot necessarily be taken for granted. While it was appealing to undertake this type of study, in order to be able to draw more generalized conclusions, it would be imperative that other communities (e.g. Francophone, Greek, etc.) be included in the sample population. It would be interesting to assess whether different community affiliations influenced teacher evaluative perceptions and practices. The translation of the questionnaire by the LANCE research laboratory at UQAM could eventually lead to similar research inquiries with Francophone teachers.

Our decision to limit the participation of respondents to teachers from cycle 1 and 2 was due as a result of the time elapsed from the start of the Quebec education reform and the planning of this research study. Today, teachers instructing students in cycle 3 would need to be included in the study. This would encapsulate the practices and perceptions of the entire faculty in elementary school.

The interview/questionnaire method used in this study limited the number of participants. In further studies, a revised questionnaire that would be more “autonomous” to administer and which would incorporate the salient points of our research could be constructed and administered to a greater number of teachers. This

type of methodology was been used with success (Matias, 2003; Landry –Cuerrier, 2004).

This study has established that there is a disparity between teacher perceptions regarding evaluation and what they practiced in the classroom depending on various factors. It may be worthwhile to undertake a study to further investigate the apparent differences found in this study between teacher perception and practices when it relates to student assessment. Investigating the divergence between teachers' theories and assumptions on assessment and learning and their classroom practices could provide understandings that could help to find ways (ex. : partaking in professional development opportunities that address the question of contextualized evaluations; testing new evaluation instruments; support from colleagues , the administration and/or from parents; etc.) that would help bridge the gap between teacher interest (and perceptions) and their actual assessment practices. Often teachers strive to add a sense of novelty to their teaching practices (e.g. trying and progressively mastering new assessment tools). However, the context in which they work does not always allow them to bring this desire to fruition.

Lastly, in the context of the new education reforms currently being implemented in Quebec, it would be interesting to investigate, in parallel with other studies focusing on teachers, student perceptions of teaching and evaluating practices. The student-teacher relationship is a working partnership that must be applied in both teaching and evaluating. Furthermore, our study showed clearly that for a large number of teachers, the perception and interest of their students is an important element in helping them to decide the choice of evaluative materials to use.

CONCLUSION

Quebec teachers were consulted and some have been involved in the planning committees for the education reform. Involving teachers in the development and implementation process has been shown to have a variety of positive effects on classroom teaching and learning. These include raising teachers' expectations, encouraging teachers to rethink their roles, adapting their teaching strategies, supporting more active learning and nurturing reflective practices (Aschbacher, 1994).

Participation in this research study by some members of the teaching community is - in its own humble way - sort of a measure or reflection of the acceptance, the willingness, or the capacity of all teachers to adhere to the recommendations brought forth by the Quebec Ministry of Education. Obviously the consultation process must continue; be it by research of the type conducted here or by other mechanisms put into place by the Quebec Ministry of Education. While the initial measures of consultation are interesting they are not sufficient. The focus should now include the difficult question of how to adopt relative and appropriate student assessment procedures in association with the educational philosophy of the Quebec education reform.

Building capacity of teachers to improve their assessment skills should be a priority if learning is to become increasingly meaningful. The Quebec Education Ministry must realize that improving educational standards goes beyond community mobilization, effective management of external examinations, construction of school buildings, and availability of teachers and books. It includes good classroom practices of which assessment of students is a critical aspect.

If the current curriculum change underway in Quebec is to be “child centered”, then teacher assessment practices must be directed likewise. Our assessment practices must reflect our philosophy. The more educators have examined these problems, the more they have recognized the need for diverse means to assess their students. Assessment should, ideally, reflect what a student knows, as well indicating how a student learns best. In order to appraise understanding in the truest sense, we must explore the student's responses and observe the organization of student's actions (be it mental or physical) while resolving a problem or realizing a complex task. Most teachers in our study professed that evaluation using both traditional and alternative assessment methods certainly offers a more valid means of assessing knowledge and growth than evaluative practices that utilize only one method of evaluation. In addition, a large majority of teachers (mainly from the Lester B Pearson School Board) noted that the use of alternative assessment methods, complimented by the use of traditional testing techniques, aligned with their philosophy in its emphasis on the whole child and individualized instruction through the interaction between student and teacher.

As learning in schools is redefined, both the curriculum and the classroom environment need to be aligned. With the expanded concept of learning, it is increasingly important to remember that paper-and-pencil testing is only one way to collect information about student learning. A broader concept of assessment is more appropriate. Assessment includes paper-and-pencil testing but may also include other procedures such as rating items on scales, observing student performances in projects that they undertake, in other authentic or “real-world” tasks and activities, critiquing and co-critiquing student products, or even in conducting interviews with students in order to retrace the procedures used or the sequence of actions taken during the realization of a project or a task.

Emerging from contemporary research into how students learn is the paradigm that stresses that true education must be student-centered and have relevance to the student's experiences. In addition, the responses of teachers in this study, allows us to conclude that assessment practices need to tap and build upon the strengths that learners, in all their diversity, bring to the learning situation. As such, alternative assessment helps to broaden the kind of information that is collected about students and the way that this information is used in the evaluation of student learning. Meaningful learning occurs when a student has a knowledge base that can be used with fluency to help them make sense of the world, solve problems, and make decisions. According to the review of literature presented in chapter 1, specially the one explored in section 1.3, students need to be self-determined, feel capable, and continually strive to acquire and use the tools they have to learn. They need to be strategic learners who have a repertoire of effective strategies for their own learning.

It is our belief that schools need to offer "traditional" teachers an opportunity to incorporate new methods into their approach to assessment. They may, contrary to their fears, find these activities to be quite enlightening and not as time consuming as presupposed. They may, as we believe, discover much about the way their students think, learn, and understand. Alternative assessments offer the advantages of being sensitive to student differences and to students with particular learning styles. Several of the teachers interviewed mentioned that alternative assessment proved a definite advantage to those students who had previously been considered possible failures. It allowed them to demonstrate their abilities to reason and think critically.

The feedback of the teachers in this study suggests that increased use of alternative assessments will empower not only teachers, but the students themselves. Moreover, alternative assessment can influence curriculum decision-making by revising the role of the classroom teachers. This assessment concept can be viewed

as a move toward teacher empowerment and increased responsibility for curriculum decision-making. There appears to be a temptation in the development of curriculum to try to create materials that will replace the need for teachers to exercise judgment, but the success of alternative assessment depends upon the teacher's exercise of sound professional judgment and sensitive, intelligent interpretation. It is definitely not "teacher-proof." Instead, it insists that curriculum development utilize the tremendous power and potential in the experience and wisdom of classroom teachers. Success also depends a great deal on the personal characteristics of teachers for they must be open to new ideas and willing to develop new teaching skills as they guide rather than dominate.

If indeed the shape of the educational experience for students is being changed, as the results of this study suggests, then the methods that have been used previously to evaluate successful student learning need to undergo a shift as well. As different abilities and skills become increasingly valued in schools, new visions of assessment increasingly include assessment of the various abilities and skills. Moving to a concept of "multidimensional assessment" - where alternative assessments play a large role in collaboration with traditional testing methods, means that evaluation of students will be based on a broader concept of intelligence, ability, and learning. Not only will logical and verbal abilities continue to be assessed, but assessment also will include visual, auditory, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal abilities. This means assessing students' repertoire of learning strategies, skills in communicating with others, and knowledge as it is applied to day-to-day and culturally diverse contexts.

While the change may be gradual and somewhat laborious, one can be encouraged by the results of this study in that a new vision of learning and evaluation of student learning is emerging in our educational system here in Quebec. This vision

is reflected in terms of assessment practices and policies that are broad-based, relevant to real life, process oriented, and based on multiple measures which provide a rich portrayal of student learning. As we seek to employ such alternative assessment methods to aid in the improvement of teaching and learning, we should nevertheless not ignore traditional techniques. What is needed is a combination and balance of assessment practices. A balanced assessment should be used to construct a true portrait of how a student learns and what they have learnt. Before accepting new assessment methods and rejecting “old” ones, we should look for the best parts of each. One of the advantages of a balanced assessment plan is that teachers have a variety of ways to assess students’ needs and evaluate their progress. Only then will we be able to develop and implement assessment techniques, alternative or otherwise, that will support student overall learning.

APPENDIX A

TEACHER PARTICIPATION LETTER

Montreal (Date)

Dear teachers,

Exciting times are abound in the world of education here in Quebec! The main goals of the classroom learning and assessment process appear to be changing. There are a number of recent and upcoming assessment initiatives taking place in Quebec.

In order for the educational changes currently taking place to be successful, a conscientious effort must be made to involve and pay particular attention to the opinions of teachers.

You are invited to participate in a research study titled “**Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions: The Use of Alternative Assessments within the Quebec Educational Reform**”. This study will review the student assessment practices most commonly used by elementary level teachers. The study will also examine the perception of teachers with respects to assessment. Finally, the study will explore the knowledge and perception of teachers pertaining to the use of alternative assessments.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Those of you who are interested in joining the study will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. Your responses on the questionnaire will remain anonymous and confidential. Teachers will be provided with a small remuneration for their participation in the study.

Cont’...

I will be provided with a box in the teacher's lounge for correspondence regarding the study. If you are interested in taking part in our study, please detach the bottom of the page and place it in my box. I will contact you shortly to provide you with more information. If you have any questions with regard to the study please do not hesitate to drop me a note. You could always contact me at 514 987-3000 ext 1672 or you can e-mail me at yelharrar@aol.com.

Yours truly,

Yaniv Elharrar
Department of Psychology
Université du Québec à Montréal
Ph.D. student

Dr. Tamara Lemerise
Department of Psychology
Université du Québec à Montréal
Research supervisor

Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions: The Use of Alternative Assessments Research Study

I, _____, would like to participate in this research project.
The best time (s) to reach me at school would be at _____ or
_____. I could be reached in school (optional) at
(514)_____.

APPENDIX B

THE TEACHER ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

*The Teacher Assessment Practices
And Perceptions Questionnaire*

INTRODUCTION

General Information

Please indicate your answer by checking off the most appropriate box.

School: _____

Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Age: ☐ 25 or less ☐ 25 –35 ☐ 36 –46 ☐ 47 –56 ☐ 57 or more

WHAT DO YOU TEACH?

English ☐ Cycle 1 ☐
Cycle 2 ☐

French ☐ Cycle 1 ☐
Cycle 2 ☐

Math ☐ Cycle 1 ☐
Cycle 2 ☐

Group: ☐ Regular classroom ☐ Remediation ☐ Special Education

Other: _____

Number of years teaching: _____

Number of years teaching in present school: _____

Last degree completed: ☐ Bachelors ☐ Masters
 ☐ Doctorate ☐ Other: _____

SECTION I

Student Assessment

Please answer the following questions. Your answers will be recorded on an audiocassette.

Assessment Practices

1. Depending on the subject you teach (i.e. Math and/or Languages) please indicate for each of the following types of assessment whether you use them:

- a) Most often
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

	<u>Math</u>	<u>Languages</u>
Multiple-choice tests	_____	_____
Short-answer tests	_____	_____
Fill-in-the blanks tests	_____	_____
Oral presentations	_____	_____
Written projects	_____	_____
Authentic / "real-life" tasks	_____	_____
Portfolios (showcase, process, other)	_____	_____
Others _____	_____	_____

2. How often during the course of the school year do you measure your students' general academic progress (e.g. daily, weekly, bi-monthly, etc.)?

3. Do you use different types of evaluation for different reasons or purposes?

For example:

- a) For reporting purposes
- b) For planning subsequent teaching

4. Are there certain types of assessment methods that you employ depending on the subject? Or on the competencies being taught?
5. Have you ever had to adapt your methods of evaluation because of the diversity of the students in your class? Please explain how you did this.
6. Do you involve your students in the assessment process? If so, please elaborate on how you do this.
7. Have you changed or modified your evaluation practices in the last two years? If so, what has inspired this change?

Assessment Perceptions

8. What do you feel are the primary reasons for evaluating students in school? What do you feel should be the primary reasons for evaluating students?
9. What are the main advantages of the assessment practices that you use most often in your classrooms?
10. Do you perceive a disadvantage or drawback to the assessment practices that you use most often in your classrooms? If so, what are they?
11. Describe the assessment method you remember using that gave you the most satisfaction / that seemed to benefit your students the most?
12. Has the current educational reform changed the way in which you view student assessment? If so, how?

SECTION II

Alternative Assessment

Definition

13. In the current literature and within the field of education much talk recently has focused on traditional versus alternative assessment.

A. What is your understanding of “traditional assessment”?

B. What is your understanding of “alternative assessment”?

14. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement as it relates to features of alternative assessment methods.

Note: According to the literature, alternative assessment usually refers to methods of evaluation that require students to create an answer or product that demonstrates their knowledge and skills. Alternative assessments generally have two parts: a clearly defined task and a list of explicit criteria for assessing student performance or product.

(Questionnaire provided to teacher for completion)

Training

15. Have you been informed about the Quebec Education Program (Q.E.P.)? Do you presently have material explaining the new evaluation proposals of the Q.E.P?

16. Please indicate the amount of alternative assessment training that you have received over the course of the last two years for each type of training option. Please specify the amount received on the line provided.

(Questionnaire provided to teacher for completion)

17. Please rank the type of training that you feel would best serve to help familiarize teachers with the use of alternative assessments. Rank them in descending order: (e.g. 1-most beneficial, 2-beneficial, 3-somewhat beneficial, etc.).

(Questionnaire provided to teacher for completion)

General Reflections

18. Overall, are you in favor of the use of alternative assessments in the classroom?

19. If you had the necessary materials would you use alternative assessment methods? If so, which types would you prefer using?

20. Do you anticipate using alternative assessment methods to evaluate your students in the future? Please explain your answer.

21. How do you think your students would react if you were to increase the use of alternative assessments in the classroom?

QUESTION # 14

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement as it relates to features of alternative assessment methods.

Note: According to the literature, alternative assessment usually refers to methods of evaluation that require students to create an answer or product that demonstrates their knowledge and skills. Alternative assessments generally have two parts: a clearly defined task and a list of explicit criteria for assessing student performance or product.

Level of Agreement					
Features	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
Are easy to administer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are adaptable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide good student feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide good interpretative value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are connected to reality / the students real-life environment</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assess thinking and higher-order cognitive processing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide standardised and objective results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allow for inferences about students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are sensitive to individual student differences</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sensitive to different forms of student learning styles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help students learn to cooperate and collaborate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help students learn from other classmates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage student decision-making and problem solving skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Level of Agreement					
Features	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>I Don't Know</u>
Are beneficial for teaching practices and improved instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are subjective in nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Require substantial amounts of time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide useful input on student progress of competencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide rich data on student knowledge and understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permit observation of student learning in various situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION # 16

Please indicate the amount of alternative assessment training that you have received over the course of the last two years for each type of training option. Please specify the amount received on the line provided.

Amount of training			
Type of training	<u>A great deal</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>None</u>
Specific courses on the subject	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-school workshops	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-school workshops	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conferences and seminars	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical experience / internships	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent reading	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentorship	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION # 17

Please rank the type of training that you feel would best serve to help familiarize teachers with the use of alternative assessments. Rank them in descending order: (e.g. 1-most beneficial, 2-beneficial, 3-somewhat beneficial, etc.).

<u>Type of Training</u>	<u>Rank according to benefit</u>
Specific courses on the subject	—
In-school workshops	—
Out-of-school workshops	—
Independent reading	—
Staff meetings to discuss the topic	—
Development of manuals / text books	—
Conferences and seminars	—
Practical experience / internships	—
Mentorship	—
Other _____	—

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO THE EXPERTS

Montreal,

Dear Sir / Madam:

I am currently pursuing doctoral studies in psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal. My research study is titled "*Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions: The Use of Alternative Assessments within the Quebec Educational Reform*". This study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Tamara Lemerise.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of attention given to assessments of students in the classroom. Assessment of student learning has become a topic of great emphasis in the educational literature. Here in Quebec, assessment policy and procedures has now moved to the forefront of the educational reform movement. New approaches to learning (e.g. competence-based learning, teaching by cycles, etc.) have spawned new ways of evaluating students. Certain schools and their teaching staff have proposed new evaluation methods adapted to the new curriculum. Other schools and their teachers are in process of exploring the issue. Our research group has been quite interested in exploring the evaluation of student learning within the Quebec school systems. We are particularly interested in examining the general knowledge and perception of teachers in regards to novel evaluation practices.

In lieu of the new evaluation policies being proposed by the Quebec Ministry of Education as part of the educational reforms, our study attempts to outline the assessment practices and perceptions of Montreal-based Cycle 1 and 2 elementary teachers, with particular emphasis placed on the study of alternative assessment utilization. The study has three main objectives:

- 1) To document the assessment practices most commonly used by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in two subjects: Language Arts (French or English), and Math.
- 2) To explore the assessment perceptions held by Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers.
- 3) To assess the knowledge, perceptions, and willingness of Cycle One and Cycle Two teachers in the use of various forms of *alternative assessments* in different learning situations.

A sample of approximately 100 elementary Cycle 1 and 2, English /French and Math teachers affiliated with the English Montreal School Board and the Independent Jewish Day Schools of Montreal will be solicited to take part in the study.

This study will allow us to highlight the practices, beliefs, and interests of a certain number of teachers already implicated in the curriculum reforms. It is hoped that this study will provide greater direction in regards to any future orientation aimed at helping teachers to vary their available repertoire of assessment tools in view of their level of knowledge, beliefs, and values. In addition, we are optimistic that this study will help teachers gain a better understanding and help cultivate a certain curiosity of various innovative forms of student assessments.

Here now is the goal and objective of this letter, which is addressed to several experts in the field of learning and student evaluation:

We have started to take the necessary steps in order to refine and validate the research tool that will be used to collect our data. As an expert in the field of education we were hoping for your collaboration and assistance in the validation phase of the questionnaire. Your opinions and feedback regarding the questionnaire are a vital part of the validation process.

The questionnaire was constructed specifically for the present research study. Its development was inspired by the literature reviewed, by the objectives of this study, and by similar instruments created by various researchers. The *Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions Questionnaire* is designed to directly assess the classroom evaluative practices and perceptions of teachers, with particular emphasis on the use of alternative assessments. The format of the questionnaire is mainly that of a semi-structured interview. Thus, the questionnaire serves as a kind of guide during the interview and ensures that the same information is obtained from the different subjects. The interview will be conducted with a fairly open framework that allows for focused, conversational, two-way communication. Within the list of topic or subject areas, we will pursue certain questions in greater depth and will have the flexibility to probe for details or discuss issues. The interview portion of the questionnaire will be recorded by audiocassette. Finally, there are also some Likert-type scales that the teachers are asked to complete by checking off the most appropriate answer.

I have attached a copy of the questionnaire to this letter. Your comments and/or suggestions regarding any aspect of the questionnaire are of great importance to us. Please feel free to provide as much feedback as you deem appropriate. For example, comments or suggestions could focus on the clarify of the questions, whether the questionnaire adequately addresses the research questions and area of focus, whether certain questions should be reworded, dropped, or otherwise refined, and whether the construct of interest is encompassed by this research instrument. Please feel free to transcribe your comments directly onto the questionnaire.

Should you have any further questions or wish to obtain more information about the research study please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at yelharrar@aol.com or by phone at 944-6702. I have enclosed a pre-stamped envelope in which to mail back the documentation. It would be most helpful if you could return the material before December 20th, 2002.

Thanking you in advance for your immeasurable assistance and collaboration.

Sincerely,

Yaniv Elharrar
Doctoral student
Psychology Department, UQAM University

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF CONSENT

Letter of consent

You have been invited to participate in a research study titled “Teacher Assessment Practices and Perceptions: The Use of Alternative Assessments within the Quebec Educational Reform”. This study is being conducted by Yaniv Elharrar under the supervision of Dr. Tamara Lemerise in the Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal.

The purpose of the study is to review the student assessment practices most commonly used by elementary-level teachers in today’s classroom environment. The study will also explore the perceptions of teachers with respects to student assessment. Furthermore, the study hopes to gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge in regards to alternative assessment use with elementary level students. Alternative assessments refer to testing methods that require students to create an answer or product that demonstrates their knowledge and skills. Examples of alternative assessments include classroom projects, presentations, and portfolios.

In this study you will complete a questionnaire. Some demographic information is collected as well. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time. You are free to not answer any question and to not have this survey be part of the data set.

The questionnaires will be kept confidential by the researcher. The information you provide will help further our research in student assessment practices and more specifically in the area of alternative assessment practice. All information obtained in this study are strictly confidential. Your name will NOT be used for any portion of this study. If any information is published, there will be no information that would identify you as a participant.

Please sign below to indicate you have read this paragraph that you are aware of the objectives of the current research, that you agree to participate in the study, and that you authorize the use of data collected from the questionnaire for research purposes.

Thank you

Participant’s Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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